THE BLIND *OBEDIENCE* OF AN HUMBLE *PENITENT.*

THE

Best Cure for Scruples.

AN. DOM. M. DC. XCVIII.

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A. H. L. C.

TO THE READER.

Scrupulosity is a Disease of the Mind, which many people have more or less of; although few believe it, & fewer are willing to own it. The greatest part, & the wisest, are commonly ashamed of it. But yet there are some (the fewer, the better) who think it a fine thing to be longer than ordinary, in consulting, in preparing, & confessing. The more they out-do their neighbours in these matters, & the more they are taken notice of for being singular,

ſo much more they admire themſelves for being skillfull, carefull, & exact. They ſeem to affect theſe tedious & tormenting Scrupuloſities, as if they thought them to be the Modish Diſtemper of the Saints: And, if one may judge by appearances, they are like a certain Lady, who having entertain'd the company with a long hiſtory of her Vapours, could not endure to hear a Gentlewoman, inferiour to her ſelf, begin to complain of the ſame indiſpoſition. Marry come up, *ſays her Ladyship*, we ſhall have every body, one of theſe days, take upon them to be troubled with Vapours,

pours, if ſuch as you pretend to it.

Tis hard to determine which is greater, the Folly or the Miſchief of Scrupuloſity. Take it one way, there is no ſubject more ſerious: take it the other, there is nothing more ridiculous. My chief deſign is to prevent the Miſchief of it, without ſparing the Folly, when it happens to lie in my way. And truly, when people are ſo fond of their Scruples, I am apt to think, it is not amiſs to let them ſee how ſilly the humour is. There is always a ſecret Pride lies lurking in the bottom, when they are ſo ſtiff

in their opinion; and a little ſenſe of ſhame is in ſome meaſure a remedy for it. If one always treat theſe follies with reſpect & gravity, it will onely ſerve to confirm them in a vain belief, that their miſtakes are wiſe ones: And this being wiſe in their own conceits *is the chief part of their Diſeaſe.*

*In fine, well or ill, I have now done Scribling: And, upon ſecond thoughts, am in ſome admiration how I ever prevail'd with my ſelf, to begin. But, being once enter'd, and having already publiſh'd * ſome ſmall Pieces,*

* *A Contrite & Humble Heart: Three Sermons upon the Sacrament: A Letter concerning the Council of Trent: &c.*

I was not willing to leave off, till I had made a preſent of this little Treatiſe to my Friends: to whom if it prove acceptable & uſefull, I ſhall not think my labour loſt: And, for the reſt, the care is taken.

Mean time I keep my name to my ſelf: And my reaſon is, becauſe I love a quiet life. I ever lookt upon it as the greateſt bleſſing which a bad World can afford: and am perſwaded that being Private is the eaſieſt & ſecureſt way of being Quiet. Beſides, I ſee no good there is in being talkt of; either well, or ill: The one

is

is good for nothing but to make a man Vain; the other is as apt to make him Vext; and All to no purpose.

ERRATA.

Page. 40. *line.* 23. *dele* we. *page.* 84. *line.* 20. *dele* the. *page.* 90. *line.* 21. *read* get. *page* 92. *line* 1. *read* harmony. *page.* 135. *line.* 15. *read* they. *page.* 167. *line.* 1. dele *they.* These, & such other over-sights of the Press, the Reader (I hope) will easily pardon.

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APPROBATION.

I Have read this learned Treatise, concerning *Blind Obedience*, which I judge very usefull, & observed nothing in it, but solid & orthodox. *Dat. Lovanij.* 17. *Aprilis.* 1698.

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THE

THE BLIND OBEDIENCE OF AN HUMBLE PENITENT.

CHAP. I.

The Character of Blind Obedience, and of Scrupulosity which is humble & submissive.

BLind Obedience is an ill name which the World has given to one of the best things in it. I do not call it so, because I think

think it is ſo; but becauſe the cuſtom of ſpeaking will have it ſo, and many people will not underſtand me if I uſe another term for it. However I ſhall endeavour to do it ſo much juſtice, as to ſhew plainly in a familiar example, that ſo good a thing does not deſerve ſo bad a name.

Let us ſuppoſe two Travellers in the ſame way to the ſame home, & that their lives & fortunes depend upon their coming timely thither. The one goes ſlowly on, & oftentimes ſtands ſtill to ſatisfie his curioſity, either in looking back to take a proſpect of the Country which he leaves behind him, or elſe in ſtudying whether the foot-way on the right hand or the left be better than the way he's in: Whileſt he is thus amuſed with idle

idle fancies, time runs on, the day is ſpent, he is benighted before he is aware, & begins to repent when 'tis too late. His fellow-traveller conſiders that all theſe vain amuſements are nothing to his purpoſe, he is full of concern for the great affair he has in hand, & therefore he marches diligently on, minds carefully the way before him, & never ſtops to look behind, or gaze about him. Will any body ſay, this man is blind, becauſe he does not ſee backward? or becauſe he does not ſtare about him, on the one ſide, or the other? All his buſineſs is to go forward, he ſees the way before him as well as any man living, he ſees all that he has need to ſee; and therefore, whoſoever ſays this man is blind, muſt excuſe me if I cannot believe it.

The Case of these two Travellers is dayly verified in scrupulous persons, of which there are two sorts: the one proud & willfull, the other humble & submissive. Those rely upon themselves, & these upon their Guide. Those always are disturb'd with idle doubts & fears which are not worth a serious thought: These never trouble their heads with any thing but their chief business, which is to march diligently on, for fear of coming late; they never stop to look backward, for fear of having dropt something behind them; they never stand still to observe the different paths on either side of the road; they carefully observe the sure direction of their Guide, and, without disputing the matter with him, are contented to follow whersoêre he

leads. This is the true character of the Obedience I ſpeak of: It is always ready to march at firſt word of command; it never pauſes to gaze behind it, or on either ſide; it clearly ſees the way which it is bid to take, & never perplexes it ſelf with any doubts about it, becauſe it is ſelf-evident there can be no other way for true Obedience. What a ſpitefull thing it is, to ſay, that this Obedience is *blind*, when it *ſees* its way ſo *clearly*, & is ſo *certain* of it!

This humble & ſubmiſſive Scrupuloſity is rather to be envied, than be pitied. To theſe there is no need of preaching Blind Obedience. They are very well acquainted with it: 'tis their dayly practice, & perpetual comfort: 'tis by this they overcome their

doubts & fears; and though they are not quite so easy as they would be, yet they are contented & resign'd. Their Scrupulosity, though sometimes painfull, is always advantagious to them: the experience of their weakness humbles them, & fortifies them in the practice of Obedience, it not onely puts them in the way to Heaven; but it helps to keep them in it; and therefore I have no more to say to them at present, but onely to wish them a good journey. The proud & willfull Sinners are the persons, I have now to deal with: Those Sinners who are not contented to be Saints *according to God's heart*, but *must* & *will* be *Saints* according to their *own*.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

The true Causes of proud & willfull Scrupulosity.

OUr Doctors & Divines, who treat of Scruples, observe several causes of them: 1. Melancholy, which is sometimes cured by physick: 2. Suggestion of the Devil, against whom the best defence is prayer: 3. Conversation of Scrupulous persons, whose needless discourses of their inward troubles, ought to be shunn'd as infectious: 4. Reading of casuistical books, which are to be avoided as remedies unfit for the disease: 5. Excess of servile fear, which dayly diminishes as the Love of God encreases. These are the Causes which they commonly

take notice of; but they are nothing to my preſent purpoſe: becauſe a complication of them all together, may conſiſt with being humble & ſubmiſſive.

The true & proper Cauſes of our being proud & willfull in our Scruples, are the Eſteem of our Judgment, & the Love of our Liberty, which we derive originally from the Sin of our firſt Parents. We are curious of *knowing good & evil*: we are ambitious of *being like the Higheſt*: we are deſirous of being abſolute and independent in all our thoughts & actions: we would willingly be uncontrollable in both: we would fain do what we think, & think what we pleaſe: in a word, we would gladly chuſe our own way, and be our own Judges whether we have choſen right or wrong.

Tis

Tis obvious to every body's natural reaſon, that Scrupulous perſons would never be proud, if they had not an eſteem of their judgment; neither would they be willfull in their Scruples, if they did not love the liberty of their humour. They eſteem their judgment, & are therefore ſo proud, they cannot endure to ſubmit it: they love their humour, & therefore are ſo willfull, they cannot abide to croſs it. To abate this love, & to correct this vain eſteem, I know nothing more proper than to expoſe the folly & the miſcheif which attend them: and therefore ſhall endeavour in the two following chapters to ſhew the extravagant effects, & the pernicious conſequences of them.

CHAP. III.

The extravagant Effects of Scrupulosity when it is proud & wilfull.

THis no wonder that humane Reason is extravagant, when Scrupulosity on the one side, & obstinacy on the other, conspire together to confound the notions of it. The one frights it out of the way; the other hinders it from coming in again: The one warps it; the other makes it stand bent: And how is't possible for any body to square their actions by such a crooked Rule. All that I wonder at, is this; that when people find, & feel by sad experience, the folly & extravagancy of their following such a Rule, they are yet

yet ſo proud & willfull as not to make uſe of a better, which God himſelf has recommended to them.

There are ſuch a vaſt variety of follies & exceſſes which their pride & willfullneſs betray them to, that I ſhould never make an end, if I pretended to take notice of them all: & therefore, to bring my matters into as little compaſs as may be, & to make them as plain & ſelf-evident as I can, I ſhall reduce them to three general heads, by conſidering the principal duties of Temperance, & by comparing that of the Body with the other of the Mind, which has moſt need of it, & ſuffers moſt for want of it.

SECT. I.

The extravagancy of their Curiosity.

THe first & least degree of Temperance obliges us to abstain from all those things, which in the common opinion of the world are poyson to us, & will certainly destroy us. A man must needs be very intemperate indeed, who longs for a belly-full of Arsenick, as much as a child does for a lump of sugar. Would you not think a man strangely willfull, who will not believe 'tis poyson, till he has tried it? Such is the folly of many scrupulous penitents, who long to know some secret truths, which if they knew for certain, the very certainty would be enough to ruine them.

them. They fright themſelves almoſt out of their wits with thinking, that their Confeſſions never are exact, that they never love God above all things, that they never do ſufficient pennance for their ſins, that they are not in the ſtate of Grace, & that they are not in the number of God's Elect. How happy ſhould they be, in caſe they did but know aſſuredly the truth of theſe important matters! If they knew onely theſe two things, 1. that they are at preſent in God's favour, 2. that they always ſhall be ſo, How cheerfully & unconcerndly would they then march forward in the way to Heaven!

I confeſs, they have all the reaſon in the world to wiſh theſe things were true: Their Eternal happineſs or miſery depend entirely

tirely upon the truth of them: But, since they may be true, without their knowledg, 'tis evidently unnecessary to know it, & unreasonable to be so eager for the assurance of it. Alas! all this is nothing but the weakness & faint-heartedness of an infirm & cowardly Spirit, which makes them over-covetous of their security: a Security which would eternally undo them, if they had it. They are terribly afraid: this Fear makes them very uneasy; & this Uneasiness creates an earnest desire of an imaginary Certainty, which may exempt them from all fear, & make them be at ease. In this proceeding there is great appearance of Humour, but not one jot of Reason: & because they are such great pretenders to reason, I shall take the pains to

prove

prove that nothing can be more unreasonable.

I. Tis impossible for any body to desire sincerely the Salvation of their Soul, without desiring at the same time to comply with all those duties, which are requisite to save it. One of these duties is Fear: we are commanded to (a) *work our Salvation with Fear & Trembling*: How then can they pretend to go to *work* without it?

II. Tis certainly a foolish thing to avoid one mischief, by incurring another equal to it. A wise man, if he were obliged to pass twixt fire & water, would be sure to mind the middle-way: he would neither burn himself for fear of drowning, nor drown himself for fear of burning. This is the present case. The way to Heaven

(a) *Philip.* 2. 12.

Heaven is the middle-way betwixt Presumption & Despair: two dreadfull precipices which descend as low as Hell. To save us from falling on either side, the way is fenc'd with Hope & Fear: Hope, that we may not despair; Fear, that we may not presume. The blood of our veins, and breath of our nostrils, are not more requisite for the life of our bodies, than Hope & Fear are necessary for the saving of our Souls: How then can they imagine that 'tis reasonable, to desire to be exempt from either?

III. The onely true Security, which can be expected in this world, is that which is grounded upon Fear. 'Tis Fear that makes us humble & diligent. By making us humble, it prepares us for the grace of God; (*b*) *He gives* his grace

(b) 1. *Pet.* 5. 5.

grace to the humble: and by making us diligent in complying with his grace, it helps us to secure our Salvation; (c) *Use diligence*, says the Apostle, *to make your calling & election sure.* Besides, 'tis Fear that makes us (d) *watch & pray, that we enter not into temptation.* By *watching* we put our selves upon a close guard, and by *praying* we obtain the assistance of Heaven against all our enemies on earth. When (e) *our Enemy the Devil goes about like a roaring Lion, seeking to devour us*, an unconcernd assurance is apt to lull us asleep: There's nothing like Fear, to make us watchfull. (f) *O God incline unto my aid; O Lord, make hast to help me.* A man, who is afraid, will say this prayer hear-

(c) 2. *Pet.* 1. 10. (d) *Math.* 26. 41.
(e) 1. *Pet.* 5. 8. (f) *Psal.* 69. 1.

heartily: but he, who thinks himself in safety, will either say it very tepidly, or not at all. To conclude in a few words; *Watching & Praying* are our best *Security*: *Fear* is the best thing in the world, to make us *watch & pray*: And therefore, they who are so fond of being *Secure*, How can they think of wishing to be *free from Fear*?

IV. The *Fanaticks* pretend to the very same assurance, which our Scrupulous people are so fond of: and Experience plainly teaches, that it onely serves to make them proud and negligent. When once they are deluded with a strong perswasion that they are God's Favourites, They take no further care: *The Lambs of the Lord may play what tricks they please.* If this be the effect of unconcernd Security; if it poyson

poyſon & ruine the Soul; what reaſon can any body have to wish for it?

V. As long as the Devil is not dead, and as long as this ſinfull flesh of ours is living in a wicked world; ſo long it is impoſſible for us to be free from three implacable enemies, the World, the Flesh, & the Devil. Heaven is the onely place of Peace, ſuch as excludes all war, all danger, & all fear: (g) *Upon Earth our life is a* continual *Warfare*: & every body knows very well, there can be no *War* without danger, nor *Danger* without juſt reaſon to *fear*. A true Security of being Happy, without any fear of being otherwiſe, is undoubtedly a very lovely thing; and Heaven it ſelf is lovely, for the very ſake of it. I do

(g) *Iob.* 7. 1.

do not wonder that good people are in love with it: and that they long to be in Heaven, to enjoy it: But to wish to have it, where we know it is not to be had, is an extravagancy which I never can sufficiently admire.

SECT. II.

The extravagancy of their Examens.

THe second degree of Temperance obliges us, not onely to abstain from poyson, but also from all excess in such meats and drinks as are good & necessary for us: and the reason is clear; because although they are good, if moderately taken, yet every great excess is hurtfull, & next door to poyson. Let a man be never so temperate in the

the choice of his diet: though he be never so cautious in consulting his Physician concerning the *quality* of it; yet, if he exceed in the *quantity*, if he eat all day & drink all night, he is certainly guilty of a very notorious intemperance.

This is the case of those Scrupulous Penitents, who are too proud to submit their judgment, & too willfull to cross their humour. To examine their Conscience, is a very good thing, & necessary for the health of their Soul: but yet there's moderation in all things; and 'tis an unpardonable extravagancy to spend the greatest part of day & night, in spelling upon sins and circumstances, & putting them together. If it were onely so much precious time so idely spent; they would be more excusable: but

but to employ their time so busily, not onely to do themselves no good, but even to do themselves a great deal of harm, is a folly which I take to be matchless. They torment themselves continually: they neglect all other duties, they bring a publick scandal upon the very character of devotion: and all this to no purpose, but onely to try to pacifie the fears of a cowardly Spirit, which has no reason in the world to be so fearfull, but because it wants a little courage to be quiet.

I must needs own, that when people are ready to sink under the weight of their uneasiness, 'tis natural to seek for comfort; but however 'tis not rational to seek it where Experience proves it is not to be found. They cannot

not eaſily ſubmit their judgment to their Confeſſor; & therefore in all their doubts they labour to ſuppreſs their fears, by ſatisfying their own Reaſon about them: But the more they range in the Wood, the more they confound & loſe themſelves. They can neither endure the thought of danger, nor the ſenſe of fear; & therefore, though they really believe it is to little purpoſe, yet they ſtill are tempted to go on, & eaſily yield to the temptation. If experience did not teach them that they try in vain, they might have ſome plea their practiſe: but to examine barely for examen ſake, is a groundleſs fancy without the leaſt colour of reaſon; & looks (if I may borrow the wit of a pleaſant modern Poet)

As if Confession *had catcht*
The itch, on purpose to be scratcht;
OR
As if Confession *were intended,*
For nothing else, but to be mended.

They think that if they examine no longer, they shall be mightily disturb'd in mind; and they always find, that the longer they examine, the more they are disturb'd. They trouble themselves for fear of being troubled: and by their willfull disobedience, in this very point, they lose God's favour, for fear of losing it. An extravagancy much like that, which the *Poet* describes, of one *Fannius*, who took the pains to kill himself, for fear his Enemy should save him the labour, & do it for him: (h)

He

(h) Hostem dum fugeret, se *Fannius* ipse peremit: Dic mihi, quis furor est, ne moriare, mori?

He fled from death, & kill'd himself in flying:
What madness is't, to die for fear of dying?

SECT. III.

The extravagancy of their Fears.

WHereas the Duties of Temperance extend themselves alike to all particular matters which regard our health, and consequently oblige us to observe a proportionable equality & regularity in all our measures: On the contrary, these proud Penitents are unequal & irregular in every thing. They are terribly fearfull, where they need not fear; and where there is most danger, they are least concern'd for't. Excessively sollicitous in

the Examen of their Conſciences; and ſupinely careleſs in the Amendment of their lives.

They are frighted into a dreadfull apprehenſion of ſome trifles, which are little or nothing to their purpoſe; and whilſt they are ſo ſtedfaſtly attentive to theſe needleſs points, they are inſenſible & ſtupid as to all things elſe. They *will* be their own *Guides*; & by God's juſt judgment upon them, they are *blind* ones. They are like the *blind Guides* in the Goſpel, (i) *who ſtrein at a gnat, & ſwallow a Camel.* They ſtartle at every inconſiderable difficulty invented by their own imagination; and, in things of great importance, go on as boldly & as unconcerndly as if they did not ſee Hell gaping under their feet. Their

(i) *Math.* 23. 24.

Their ſtomach riſes at the very thought of reſigning their judgment in doubtfull caſes; and in things which are undoubtedly hurtfull, even to the degree of poyſonous, they ſit down to them with a very good appetite. All the Severities of exteriour mortification, as watchings, faſtings, hair-cloths, and the like, are commonly wellcome to them: becauſe they are well enough pleaſed with any thing that feeds their pride, & helps them to a falſe perſwaſion of their being in the high road of the Saints. Theſe things they'l practiſe, even when their Confeſſor forbids them. But, as for the (k) *renewing of their Spirit* and *their Mind*, the beſt & moſt important mortification, which is that of the Soul, by croſſing of

(k) *Ephes.* 4. 23.

their humour & ſubmitting of their judgment, They hate the very thought of it: Not a word of that; as you love them. If all this be not extravagant, Pray tell me, What is?

CHAP. IV.

The pernicious Conſequences of the ſame Scrupuloſity.

IF people might play the fool, as they pleaſe, in the way to Heaven, without being ever the worſe for it: then indeed the Scrupuloſity, I ſpeak of, would be an innocent ſort of Folly, without any Miſchief in it. But ſurely, if what we believe of Heaven & Hell be true, there can be nothing more pernicious & more fatal to us, than that ſturdy & reſty Scrupuloſity, which will neither lead nor drive,

drive, but will be always either ſtanding ſtill, or looking backwards, to obſerve the way behind it. At this rate of going to Heaven, How is it poſſible for us ever to get thither?

S. *Paul* compares the way to Heaven, to the running of a race, in which we ſtrive to win the prize of everlaſting Glory. Conſider onely what a diſadvantage it is for a man to look behind him all the way he runs. Without queſtion he who looks before him, advances with much more eaſe, much greater ſpeed, & much leſs danger: whereas he who looks behind him, muſt needs move very ſlowly & uneaſily, beſides being expoſed every moment to a double danger, either of falling, or of miſſing his way. If theſe people thought the way to Heaven eaſy,

they would not be so much afraid as they are: and, if they think it hard to find, why are they always gazing backwards? The way lies before them; and looking forward is the surest way to find it.

Our Saviour bids us (*l*) *strive to enter in at the strait Gate: for many will seek to enter in, & shall not be able.* We must *strive to enter*: We must not lose time: we must make what haste we can: & how can we make haste, if we are always looking behind us? Besides, the *Gate* is *strait*: If it were wide enough, one might hit it without aiming at it: but, being so *strait* as it is, if we are always looking behind us, 'tis impossible to hit it. And therefore 'tis no wonder that our Saviour adds, *Many will strive to enter in, &*

(*l*) *Luke.* 13. 24.

& shall not be able: because many will be always puzzling their brains with making, or mending, their general confessions; & always looking whence they come, without minding whither they go.

SECT. I.

The difference betwixt Servile Fear and Loving Confidence.

ONe of the principal causes from whence this great disorder proceeds, is (*m*) *an excess of servile Fear*; and 'tis a thousand pities they are so much over-power'd with it. Tis true;

(m) nimius timor servilis, quem generat nimius amor proprius, quemquo diminuit perfecta charitas, ex quâ & ex timore filiali rarò nascitur hæc affectio. *Suarez* 1. 2. disp. 12. sect. ult. n. 1.

Fear is good; & 'tis (*n*) *the beginning of wisdom*: But what is the Beginning good for, if it never bring them to the End? (*o*) *The end of the Law is Love.* When servile Fear is grown to a very great excess, 'tis like the winter-season of the Soul; 'tis a certain chillines of Love, which makes them quake & tremble, whether they will or no. If they had but time to breath a while; if they had any respite to consider the Divine Goodness; if their continual fears would give them leasure to (*p*) *tast & see how sweet God is*; the *Love* of him would soon improve in their hearts; it would be like the Sun's approaching nigher their Meridian; it would warm them, quicken them, & drive away the chilly coldness of their *Fear*. True

(*n*) *Psal.* 110. 10. (*o*) 1. *Tim.* 1. 5.
(*p*) *Psal* 39. 9.

True Friendship naturally inſpires a loving Confidence in our Friend. The more we love him, the more we confide in him. And if we love him very much, we are apt to have ſo much confidence in him, as to think it almoſt impoſſible for him to find in his heart to hurt us. If this be ſo, even amongſt us mortals, notwithſtanding our ill nature & our being ſubject to miſtake, ſurely the ſelf-ſame reaſon is of much more force, when 'tis applied to God. Our friends on earth may be miſtaken, & ſuſpect our love; or elſe may poſſibly be ſo illnatur'd as to ſlight it, though they know it. But our God can neither be illnatur'd to us, nor miſtaken in us: if we love him, we may be aſſured, he always knows it, and he never ſlights it.

Tis S. *Auſtin*'s Maxim: *Love, & Do what you will.* Do but *love* God, and whatever you *do*, under the direction & influence of this Love, will never diſturb your peace. Do but *love* him heartily, and then you will never purpoſely and deliberately deſign to offend him: your chief deſign will always be to pleaſe him: and, whatſoever frailties or ſurpriſes happen, as long as this deſign ſubſiſts, you need not doubt but that they always will be pardonable. Do but *love* him above all things, and all your imperfections, whatſoere they are, will onely ſerve to humble you, they never will incline you to deſpair.

S. *Peter* tells us, that (p) *Love covers a multitude of faults.* Conſider

(p) 1. *Pet.* 4. 8.

ſider onely the imperfections of little children: how frequent, & how troubleſome they are: And yet the tenderneſs of any loving Parent *covers* all. Theſe children are dutifull in the main: they love their Parents better than any other friends: and are ſorry for nothing more than for offending them. On the other ſide, their Parents, who ſee it, are ſatisfied in the main: They are content to bear with other dayly failings: They correct & chide them for their leſſer faults: But, though they are frequently diſpleas'd, there is no danger of their children being disinherited. The more we ſee, & the more clearly we diſcover, the guilt of all our dayly trespaſſes, the more we ought to humble our ſelves in preſence of our God, and love him ſo much more for loving

ving us in ſpite of all our faults, and for aſſuring us that if our Love perſever to the end, we ſhall never loſe our right to the inheritance of Heaven. Is not this enough to moderate & govern all our fears? What need we wish for more?

SECT. II.

The miſchief of long Examens.

IF Scrupulous people would but find a little leaſure to conſider ſeriously ſuch comfortable truths as theſe, they would ſoon find benefit by them: but their miſchief is, they have always ſomething elſe to do, when they ſhould think *how good* God is. Inſtead of calling to mind how kind & tender a *Father* they have *in Heaven*, their buſy thoughts

are

are entertain'd with fancies of his being a severe & cruel *Tyrant* upon *Earth*. A Tyrant that exacts more from them than their utmost diligence is able to perform: an Enemy that always watches to destroy them, & delights in laying hold of any opportunity to ruine them: a Master so intolerably rigid in exacting his accounts, that when his Slaves have done whatever they can, 'tis all in vain, there is no possibility of ever making even reckonings with him. I will not say, they absolutely *are* of this opinion: but this I am sure of, they behave themselves as if they *were*. 'Tis hard to determine what opinion they are of; or whether they have any opinion at all. The onely conjecture which I dare rely upon, is this: that where their Fears pre-

vail,

vail, they are little better (if not worse) than Infidels. They dare not believe the Church of God, nor even God himself: and therefore 'tis no wonder, if they dare not trust their Confessor.

The Word of God himself assures them in general, that (q) *his Commands are not grievous*: and yet they cannot believe it. They think the obligation of confessing is the most grievous thing imaginable; & that 'tis morally impossible to be comply'd with.

The Council of *Trent* assures them in particular, that *this* Command *is not grievous*. It declares, that (r) *it is an impious thing*, either *to say it is impossible, or to call it a Torture of Consciences*. They do not believe this neither. They find by experience that

(q) 1. Jo. 5. 3. (r) Sess. 14. cap. 5.

that their Spirits are upon the wrack, & that it is a *Torture* to them, whensoever they prepare for Confession. 'Tis true; it is their own fault, who are willfull in over-doing their duty. But this is another truth, which they believe no more than the rest. They are too proud to blame themselves; and therefore lay the fault upon their obligation.

The Council declares that (s) *NOTHING MORE is required in the Church from Penitents, than that after a Di-*

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(s) constat enim, nihil aliud in Ecclesia à pœnitentibus exigi, quàm ut postquam quisque diligentius se excusserit... ea peccata confiteatur, quibus se Dominum & Deum suum mortaliter offendisse meminerit; reliqua autem peccata, quæ diligenter cogitanti non occurrunt, in universum, eâdem Confessione inclusa esse intelliguntur. *ibid.*

LIGENT EXAMEN every one confeſs thoſe ſins in which THEY REMEMBER themſelves to have offended mortally the Lord their God: & that THE REST of their Sins, whatſoever they are, *which after a diligent examen DO NOT occur to mind, are ALL underſtood to be INCLUDED in the ſame Confeſſion.* This Declaration would be as comfortable as their hearts can wish, if they did but believe it.

Nothing more is *required*, than to confeſs thoſe Sins which *they remember*; not which they *can*, but which they *do* remember. From when it plainly follows, that, if they *do not* remember, they are altogether as ſecure as if they *could not*. If we we were obliged to examine till we remember *all*; then indeed

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our proud Penitents, who willfully torture themſelves with long & tedious examens, would be very much in the right of it: But, on the contrary, 'tis evident the Council does not oblige us to *remember*; it onely obliges us to *examine*. Neither is it in the power of any Council to command a man, to have a good memory: but, ſuch as it is, a good one, or a bad one, we are commanded to be diligent in calling it to an account. This done, We neither are the better, if we remember *all*, nor worſe, if we forget the *greateſt part*. If we remember our ſins exactly, *all* & *every one* of them, What greater advantage can we expect, than to have them *all* & *every one* forgiven us? This is certainly All: & this advantage is the very ſame, to all intents & purpo-

purpoſes of pardon, although we forget the *greateſt part*, becauſe the Council has declared, they are *all* forgiven as fully & as entirely as if we had remember'd & confeſs'd them.

To what purpoſe then is all this torturing of their minds, when it manifeſtly does more harm than good? It diſturbs their thoughts, it robs them of their peace, it dries up their devotion, it deprives them of all comfort, it renders them exceſſively uneaſy, it tempts & leads them to impatience & deſpair.

To what purpoſe is all this pudder of examining? Is it to pleaſe God, or your ſelf? To pleaſe your ſelf, is a dangerous buſineſs: for, although your diſobedience may be pleaſing here, 'tis much to be fear'd the puniſhment of it will be very unpleaſant

pleaſant hereafter. And, as for pleaſing God, 'tis certain he is equally pleas'd, when he has equally forgiven us: and the Council aſſures us, He equally forgives what we forget, & as perfectly, as what we remember.

Let us now compare the doctrine of the Council, with the practice of theſe people. According to their practice, there is nothing more neceſſary than this *endleſs diligence*: and according to the Council, there is nothing more needleſs. From whence I leave you to conclude, whether or no theſe examining creatures are thoſe who *hear the Church*, or whether they are not in ſome danger of being, one day, reckon'd amongſt the *Heathens* & the *Publicans*.

SECT.

SECT. III.

Blind Obedience the beſt Remedy.

AN humble Penitent is free from theſe diſorders. His ſcrupuloſity may be fearfull; 'tis the nature of it to be ſo: but it never is incurable: becauſe 'tis truly humble & ſubmiſſive. The remedies of it are always at hand; And, with his Confeſſor's advice, he is always ready to apply them. His Confeſſor needs onely ſay the word; he never asks a reaſon *why*. He has a general reaſon for all doubtfull caſes whatſoever; a reaſon which he always carries about with him; an everlaſting reaſon which is ever the ſame, & which he is infallibly aſſured of, that *in doubtfull caſes nothing is ſo rea-*

ſonable

ſonable as Obedience. He never has any troubleſome doubts, to vex him or moleſt him. He knows for certain, what he is bid do, & *that* he does, without ever doubting of it. He fears nothing but himſelf; he fears his frailty; he fears his being diſobedient: Theſe are the onely things he fears: And therefore he is fearfull without diſcouragement, carefull without anxiety, & diligent without any trouble. He is as diligent in the examen of his Conſcience, as men of buſineſs are in any ſerious affair. More than this, he is not obliged to: and ſo much as this, is as eaſy to him, as it is ordinary to every body elſe. He is ſo humble, as to enquire of his Confeſſor; what length of time he pleaſes to allow for his examen; and ſo obedient,

dient, that he has no inclination to exceed his allowance. He begins his work, goes on with it, & ends it, all with the ſame eaſe.

He knows very well that the general reaſon of his Obedience is grounded upon as firm a foundation, as the *rock* it ſelf, upon which the *Church* is built; and therefore he never enquires after any particular reaſons, *why* his Confeſſor allows him no more time. He not onely deſpiſes all theſe curioſities, but even hates them: becauſe he firmly believes, they are as pernicious as they are ſuperfluous. Nor is it any wonder he believes it, if it be true, that *ſeeing* is *believing*; for he plainly *ſees* the ſad experience of it, in his proud & willfull neighbours, who are never quiet, but are always reſtleſs & uneaſy; never contented, but always

always labouring in vain to build Security upon the ſandy foundation of their own weak Reaſon. A Foundation which is never firm; but either flies like duſt before each puff of Wind, or elſe is waſht away, & chang'd with every Tide.

CHAP. V.

Nothing more unreaſonable than a boundleſs Liberty of reaſoning.

IT happens very unluckily for us, that the chief Faculty we have, which God has given us to govern all the reſt, is ſometimes the moſt ungovernable of them all: and that our Reaſon, which calls them all to an account, is ſometimes the moſt unaccountable it ſelf. Our Saviour

viour ſays (*t*) *Salt is good: but if the Salt have loſt its ſavour, where-with ſhall it be ſeaſon'd? It is neither fit for the Land, nor for the Dunghill, but men caſt it out.* In the ſame manner, Reaſon is good; 'tis good, to overſee our Appetites, our words, & Actions: 'tis good, to watch them, & to keep them within the bounds of Temperance & Moderation: 'tis good, to ſummon them before the Bar, examine, reprehend, & punish them for their tranſgreſſions: All this, right Reaſon is good for. But if our Reaſon it ſelf be the greateſt tranſgreſſor, the moſt intemperate, the moſt extravagant of all; What is it good for, but to be *caſt out* of doors, and (*u*) *troden under foot by men*? This, I confeſs, is a hard ſaying; a ſevere Sentence: but

(*t*) *Luk.*14. 34.35. (*u*) *Math.*5.13.

but yet, by what has been already ſaid, it plainly appears, it is not more ſevere than it deſerves.

Humane Reaſon is the beſt thing in Nature, if rightly managed; & the worſt, if a proud willfull creature have the keeping of it. Tis commonly ſaid, that *Pride will have a fall*: Nor is it any wonder, if it be always true; becauſe it looks too high to ſee the way before it. Tis like the Philoſopher who fell into a ditch whilſt he was gazing at the Stars. The Reaſon which God has given us, if rightly employ'd, would make us humble & ſubmiſſive; it would open our eyes, to ſee how fallible we are; & open our ears to hear the advice of others, who are wiſer than our ſelves. But, on the contrary, when Reaſon is abuſed,

& ill applied, it makes us proud & willfull: it puffs us up with a vain esteem of our own judgment; & the higher it raises us, the greater fall it gives us.

The fall of our first Parents had an influence upon the Understanding as well as the Will of their posterity: and a great part of our original disease consists in an insatiable Curiosity, by which we aim at being *like the Highest*. We would know all things, and have a reason for every thing. This is the desperate condition of those scrupulous persons, to whom I here address my self. They are brainsick with too much reasoning. They thirst after reason, as dropsical people after drink: and, the more you give them, the more you encrease the distemper. Reason without submis-

sion,

ſion, is the very thing which makes them ſick: and nothing will ever cure them, but an univerſal Submiſſion, in all doubtfull caſes, without any particular reaſons for it. Their Underſtanding raves continually after an infinity of idle & unneceſſary notions: and, to make it ſober, there is nothing like darkening the windows; for, whileſt you let the light break in upon it, you will never bring it to it ſelf.

At this rate, you'l ſay, God gave us our Reaſon to little purpoſe; if, in doubtfull caſes, it be better to reſign it, than to uſe it. I beg your pardon. Our Reaſon is given us, to as much purpoſe as our other Faculties are: It is given us, to make right uſe of it; and not to enjoy the pleaſure of it at our own diſcretion.

We are as much obliged to obſerve the Rules of Temperance in reaſoning, as in eating & drinking: and our Curioſity of knowing too much is oftentimes as dangerous as either Gluttony or Drunkenneſs. There are many things which are not proper for us to eat: and there are many more, which are as improper for us to know. But a proud Mind is like a depraved Appetite, & both are moſt inclined to what is moſt pernicious to them. Such was the diſeaſe of our firſt Parents, which ſtill runs in the blood of the whole Family. They had *knowledg* enough to ſerve their turn, but were not contented with it: they were curious to try the experiment of what was meant by *knowing good & evil*: they *knew* it to their ſorrow, & paid dearly for it. A

little

little Blind Obedience would have kept them in the ſtate of Innocence: but, to obey without a particular reaſon *why*, was more than they were willing to ſupport. They would not endure to be kept in any degree of Darkneſs. Their inſatiable Curioſity allow'd no terms of moderation to their Uſe of Reaſon. They would have *their eyes opened*: they would *be as Gods*: they would either know All or Nothing. See here an early example of the Intemperance of Humane Reaſon. See how ſpeedily, & how ſeverely it was puniſh'd. And learn from thence this uſefull Leſſon; that we are as much obliged to obſerve the rules of Temperance in Uſing of our Reaſon, as we are to keep a Moderation & Decorum in the Uſe of meat & drink.

All or Nothing, is the Motto of a Libertin. All that lies in his way, is lawfull to him. *What was it All made for?* What was He himſelf created for, but to *enjoy* the faculties which Nature has beſtow'd upon him? He values no other *uſe* than the *enjoyment* of them. When he plays the Glutton, or the Drunkard, &c. he juſtifies himſelf with asking, *Is it not lawfull for a man to eat, & drink, &c. What were All theſe things made for?* What were his Appetites & Reaſon made for, but to pick & chuſe, love & hate, think & do, whatêre he pleaſes? The thinking part of him (which is a thing he ſcarce knows what to think of) ſeems capable of knowing All things: and *Why ſhould any Laws of God or Man pretend to limit it?*

So

So unreaſonable is the Uſe of Humane Reaſon, when it is a Slave to Pride & Willfullneſs which commonly are the keepers & diſpoſers of it! *My Reaſon is my own*, ſay they; *God did not give it me for nothing. What matter is't, how dark & doubtfull theſe things are? My Reaſon is my Judge. My boundleſs Reaſon is capable of knowing All things: Why ſhould any body ſtint it?* The proud & boiſtrous Sea when it ſwells high, & with a full tide rushes in upon the ſhore, if it could ſpeak, might ſay the ſame thing with as good a grace: *My boundleſs waves are able to oreflow the Earth: and Why ſhould I ſtop here?* Proud Creatures! Tis in vain to lift up your rebellious hands againſt the Hand that made you; (w)

(w) *Prov.* 16. 5.

Though hand joyn in hand, you shall not be unpunish'd. He who has (x) *shut up the Sea with doors, & ſaid, Here ſhall thy proud waves be ſtay'd*; He, I ſay has ſhut up Humane Reaſon within the compaſs of its Duty, & ſaid, *Hitherto ſhalt thou come, but no further.*

(x) *Job.* 38. 8. 11.

CHAP. VI.

The difference betwixt a Philoſopher & a Chriſtian, concerning the Submiſſion of Humane Reaſon.

THE Liberties of natural Reaſon are as large as thoſe of Nature it ſelf: & as we know no certain bounds of natural cauſes & effects, ſo we preſcribe no limits to our natural

ral Reaſon in endeavouring to diſcover them. All this viſible World, & even the Maker of it (ſo far as we can trace his footſteps, & *underſtand* him *by the things* which he has *made*) are the object & the ſubject of our ſpeculations. Tis like a Garden of Delight, where Humane Reaſon may divert it ſelf; & ramble up and down without ever finding any end of it. Tis a place of Pleaſure, where a Philoſopher dayly meets with fresh diſcoveries of entertainment for his curioſity, which is the onely greedy Appetite he has. His buſineſs does not lie in Action, but in Contemplation: and, in this reſpect, he may truly ſay, the Natural World is all his own: He may *think*, & *judge*, & *reaſon*, as he pleaſes, concerning all, & every part, of it.

The Supernatural World is quite another thing. The great & glorious End, which all good Chriſtians aim at, is Supernatural: and to make our natural reaſon the ſupreme Judge of matters relating to this End, is a thing manifeſtly unreaſonable. For, although it be excuſable in a Philoſopher, to take nothing upon truſt, it would be evidently unpardonable in a Chriſtian. Of all the four laſt things, which Chriſtians ought to *remember* that they may *never ſin*; Death is the onely thing we naturally are aſſured of. No body's natural reaſon can demonſtrate what we believe concerning Judgment, Hell, or Heaven. And yet, to prepare for this Judgment, to avoid this Hell, & to enjoy this Heaven, a good Chriſtian ſacrifices all things here,

here, his fortune, his life, his friends, & whatſoever is moſt dear to him. At the approach of Death, he reſigns his Spirit into the hands of God: and although he does not *ſee* in *what* his future Happineſs conſiſts; he puts his Confidence in God, who has reveal'd his Mercies to us; and in the Church, who has aſſured us of his Promiſes. He joyfully relies upon theſe great aſſurances of more than he is able to conceive: and is content to take them upon truſt.

I do not wonder, that no body is worthy of Heaven, who dares not take God's word for it. But this I admire, that they who can truſt God with their Souls, with their Eternity, with their unſeen & unknown hopes of Happineſs in Heaven; nevertheleſs cannot ſubmit ſo far,

as to truſt him with their conduct upon Earth, & to rely upon the Guides which he has given them. If we can follow God ſo cheerfully into an unſeen World: Why can we not follow him as cheerfully through an unknown Way? The Danger ſurely is the greateſt in the End: and, if we can truſt him when we part from hence, I know no reaſon why we may not truſt him all the while we are here.

CHAP. VII.

The different Sentiments of a Proud & an Humble Penitent, concerning Blind Obedience.

HAppy are they who are blindly Obedient, without de-

demurring, reaſoning, or diſputing. They are embarkt in a Veſſell, where they may ſleep ſecure: they need not take any further care, they have *Jeſus Chriſt* for their Pilot. All that we receive from God, we ought to Sacrifice to him; and conſequently our Underſtanding as well as our Will. If we fail in this one point, our being exact in all the reſt will ſignifie little or nothing. The fall of *Lucifer*, & his companions, is a ſufficient proof. They were Angels in all other reſpects, and never had been Devils, if they had ſubmitted their Underſtanding & their Will to him who made them. That Pride which alone was enough to caſt the Angels out of Heaven, That alone, though we were Angels in all things elſe,

elſe, is enough to hinder us from ever going thither. Our beſt way to ſecure our ſelves, & to diſcover the artifices of an Enemy who is as cunning as he is malicious, is to look upon Obedience as the touch-ſtone of all the vertue and perfection which we aim at. The Devil can counterfeit all other vertues, but he could never counterfeit Obedience. Had he at firſt ſubmitted his Will & Underſtanding to his great Superior, who made him; had he but been Obedient while he was an Angel, he had never been a Devil. If Obedience be our Rule, in all our Actions, & in all the circumſtances of them; if it be our dayly buſineſs to improve & grow more perfect in complying with this Rule; it is impoſſible that we

should

should ever erre. We cannot but know what we are bid to do; and, if we know that, we know the high-way to Heaven: Let us onely do as we are bid, and we shall certainly go thither. As long as the Sheep follow their Shepherd, they are ſafe: but, if any of them go aſtray from the Flock, 'tis no wonder they are devoured by the Wolves.

Theſe are the Sentiments of an humble Penitent. But they who are proud and willfull, are not ſo eaſily ſatisfied concerning theſe matters. The very thought of Blind Obedience is like news of death, to their beloved Curioſity, & darling Humour, which they are ſo deſperately fond of. If Death it ſelf should come within their view, & shew his Sythe, and onely

onely ſome few Sands at the bottom of the Glaſs, it would not chill their Spirits more than it does to think their Curioſity muſt be buried alive, & their Humour lie as low as duſt, without ever riſing again. If they were truly Penitent, the Spirit of Repentance would inſpire a holy revenge in puniſhing thoſe Faculties of the Soul, which were the inſtruments of Sin. They would puniſh their Will, by reſtraining it in things which are indifferent, & mortifie their Underſtanding, by reſigning it in matters which are doubtfull. If they conſider'd ſeriouſly the extravagancies which attend their Pride & Curioſity, and the pernicious conſequences of their Willfull Humour, they would hate them now, as much as heretofore they

they loved them: they would not ſuffer them ſo much as to ſee the Light, which they are ſo unworthy of, but willingly condemn them to the Darkneſs of a Dungeon, during life. Tis a ſevere Sentence: But what have you to ſay againſt it, that it may not paſs?

What am I the better for my Reaſon, if I may not act according to it?

In doubtfull caſes, you never act more conformably to your own right reaſon, than when you renounce the probability of your Speculations, & ſubmit them to your Judge without reaſoning the matter with him.

My Confeſſor may be miſtaken.

Very well: He may ſo. But does not God know *that* as well as you? And yet he has appointed

pointed him to be your Judge.

I really believe he is mistaken.

You may believe the contrary, if you please; as long as you are not *certain* of it.

I have a great many reasons to think him in the wrong, and no particular reason to think him in the right.

Put all your *reasons* in one Scale: put his *Authority* in the other: And, if it have as much weight with you as it ought to have, 'twill over-weigh them all. His Authority is from God: Your reasons, which tempt you to despise it, are no better than Suggestions of the Devil. His Authority is absolutely certain & secure: Your reasons (if there happen to be any reason in them) are but doubtfull & uncertain. Put all this

this together: Conſider it well: And you will ſoon be aſhamed of diſputing ſuch matters any longer with your Confeſſor.

Is not This being what they call Prieſt-ridden?

The Wits of our profane Age are pleaſed to call it ſo. But ſome people are too witty, to be wiſe. Their buſineſs is not ſo much to underſtand any thing, as to laugh at all things. Whatever comes in their way, if it furniſh matter for a jeſt, they take no further care. They have a merry time, while it laſts. But, when their Life's in danger, there are none more tractable in the hands of a Phyſician: They'l be *Doctor-ridden* as much as you pleaſe. Nay, if it be onely their Eſtate which is in jeopardy, They'l be *Lawyer-*

yer-ridden too. They pin their their faith upon their Lawyer's ſleeve. They argue not the matter with him. They ſuffer not their Reaſon to come in competition with his Skill. He tell's them, *This is Law.* They do not conceive *how* it comes to be ſo. It ſeems unreaſonable to them. And yet they believe him: they ſubmit: and blindly follow his Advice. Beſides, when all is done, they are *Judge-ridden* whether they will or no; and neither dare nor can complain of it: becauſe they know very well, that no body is fit to live under any Form of Government, who will not ſubmit to ſuch Judges as are appointed by the Law. And truly, with all ſubmiſſion to his Majeſty, I ſee no reaſon why we ought not to have ſome reſpect for *God*'s

Judges,

Judges, as well as for the *King*'s.

CHAP. VIII.

A Scripture-Objection answer'd.

IT is written in Scripture, that (y) *if the Blind lead the Blind, they both fall into the Ditch.* But however, this Text, if rightly underſtood, is no good argument againſt Blind Obedience.

I. If *both* are innocently *blind*, 'tis certain that neither of them will fall into the pit of *Hell*, which here is repreſented by the *Ditch*. Becauſe the Divine Juſtice cannot puniſh Innocency, or condemn the Blindneſs of thoſe who are not guilty of it.

II. If

(y) *Matth.* 15. 14.

II. If a Confeſſor be proud & careleſs, ſo as to be guilty of his Blindneſs, nevertheleſs the Penitents who (in doubtfull matters) humbly & ſincerely follow his Advice, will never be punish'd for his fault, but be rewarded for obeying him. Tis written in Scripture that the Soul which commits the Sin, the ſame ſhall die; and no other ſhall ſuffer, either for it, or with it. The words are plain; (z) *The Soul that ſinneth, it ſhall die: The Son ſhall not bear the iniquity of the Father, but the wickedneſs of the wicked* Father *ſhall be upon him* onely. From whence it evidently follows, that although the Ghoſtly Father be willfully and wickedly Blind, yet all Sincere & Humble Penitents (in

(z) *Ezek.* 18.20.

(in all their doubts) may innocently & ſecurely ſubmit to him: becauſe, not being partners of his Guilt, they cannot poſſibly be made partakers of his Punishment.

III. If *both* are criminally *blind*; that is, if they love darkneſs, if they ſhut their eyes againſt the light, if they are blind becauſe they have no mind to ſee, in a word, if they are proud & willfull, as the *Phariſees* & their *Diſciples* were; Then indeed, they *both* deſerve to *fall into the Ditch.*

For example: You have no mind to obey your Confeſſor, & therefore you will not believe him: You have a mind to follow your own humour, & therefore you hearken to thoſe little reaſons, which you ſeem to have for it. In this caſe, you

are

you are not ſincere, you are partial in your own favour: you are more willing to believe your ſelf than to believe your Guide, & more deſirous to pleaſe your ſelf than to pleaſe God. This is the willfull part of your Blindneſs. Let us now conſider the pride of it it. You are naturally curious in what belongs to you: you are *wiſe in your own conceit*, & puff'd up with the thought of being ſo: you think it very hard for any body elſe to underſtand you better than you underſtand your ſelf, & therefore you value your own judgment too much, & your Confeſſor's too little. But yet your Pride and Willfullneſs are no excuſe for your Blindneſs. One fault is no excuſe for another. Your willfull Pride is a notorious fault: 'tis viſible

to

to every body elſe: and, if it did not blind you, it would be viſible to your ſelf. Tis in your power to be humble & ſubmiſſive, if you pleaſe. Tis a vertue, which if you ſeriouſly endeavour to practiſe, God will help you: and, if you heartily beg it of him, he will not fail to give it you. Mean time, as blind as you are, you are not ſo thoroughly confident of your own opinion, but that you would be glad to have it ſeconded by the Authority of your Guide. For this reaſon, you are ſo eager to diſcourſe with him; not to know his mind, but to let him know yours: not to ſubmit to what he ſays, but to make him ſubſcribe to what you think: not to learn his opinion, but to teach him your own. If

you cannot prevail ; you conſult another ; and another : And your buſineſs is to find, either a Guide that will be guided by you (which is no Guide at all) or elſe a Guide as much miſtaken as your ſelf, who is contented to lead you your own way ; and then, to be ſure, your Blindneſs will not excuſe you, becauſe 'tis your own fault from the beginning to the end. Had you humbly & ſincerely relied upon the Guide which Providence appointed you, You had been certain, either to be in the right way, or to be blameleſs, if in the wrong. But ſince you proudly & willfully left a Guide *according to God's heart*, to take another according to your own, You ſought for darkneſs, & for your punishment you found it :

it: and then indeed, you may be ſure, if your Blind Guide *fall in to the Ditch*, you'l fall in after him.

CHAP. IX.

Pretences of Reaſon anſwerd.

ONe would think, the bare conſideration of the follies & the miſchiefs which attend the pride & willfulneſs of weighing & comparing every trifling reaſon *pro* and *con*, in every doubtfull matter, One would think, I ſay, that this alone were more than abundantly ſufficient to ſatisfie any reaſonable perſon, that nothing is more rational, than to ſilence theſe impertinent reaſons, & to turn them out of doors. I am ſure there is very good rea-

ſon for it: and, if Reaſon does it, 'tis enough; the Enemies of Blind Obedience have no reaſon to complain.

And yet 'tis commonly their cuſtom, not onely to complain but to object a great many odious things againſt it, which look as if they were a little ſpiteful in miſrepreſenting it. *Has not God given us our Reaſon? Are we not accountable to him for it? And are we not bound in Duty to make the beſt uſe we can of it?*

Tis eaſily anſwer'd: We certainly are ſo: and becauſe our blind Submiſſion is grounded upon the beſt Reaſon we have, therefore 'tis certain that we make the beſt uſe we can of it, when we blindly ſubmit. Tis true; if a man pretended to banish all reaſon whatſoever,

&

& to ſubmit himſelf univerſally without any manner of reaſon for it; Then, I muſt needs confeſs, our blind Submiſſion would be the moſt unreaſonable thing in the world. But this is never practiſed or adviſed by any that I ever heard of.

Whenſoever we ſubmit our *ſpeculative* reaſons to the Authority of a Confeſſor, 'tis always under the conduct & influence of our chief *practical* Reaſon, which is ſuperior to them, & has a legal juriſdiction over them. Our *ſpeculations* are numberleſs: and, in deciding doubtfull matters, if we give them audience, our labour is in vain. For, either we hear them all together, & then there is nothing but confuſion: or elſe we hear them one by one, & then there is no end of them. Our

practical notions lie within a little compaſs: they are given us by God himſelf as rules of life & action: they are few, and eaſily underſtood; they are plain, & eaſily applied; and, which is beſt of all, the operation of them is every jot as ſafe, as the underſtanding & applying of them are eaſie. Theſe practical principles are the beſt Reaſon of Mankind. By theſe, in wordly affairs we behave our ſelves like Men; and by the ſame, in ſpiritual matters, we act like Chriſtians; And therefore, if by theſe very principles we ſuſpend & ſilence all thoſe needleſs ſpeculations, which are onely fit to trouble & moleſt us; if we command them to retire; and order them to give place to Authority: Where is the harm? Can you

you blame us for following the beſt Reaſon we have, & making the beſt uſe we can of it? When a man takes aim, & ſhuts one eye; you may ſay, he's blind, if you pleaſe: but the truth is, he onely winks with the left eye, that he may ſee much better with the right.

If this were well conſiderd, it would pacifie a little the minds of thoſe people, who purſue ſo fiercely their pretenſions to a boundleſs liberty of reaſoning. They would ſoon diſcover, not onely that the Obedience, which I plead for, is not ſo blind as they are willing to repreſent it; but alſo that it allows them as much liberty as any reaſonable man can wish for.

1. In things which are evi-

vident, or abſolutely certain, no body queſtions but that our Reaſon has free room to exerciſe it ſelf without reſtraint. No body ever goes to a Confeſſor to conſult him, whether or no they ought to believe their Creed; whether the ſeven deadly ſins be lawfull or not; or whether the ten Commandments ought to be obſerved. They have no need of troubling their Guides about thoſe things which every body knows that all the Catholick world agrees in.

2. In matters which are dark and doubtfull, where Authority has hitherto been ſilent, & where we have not the opportunity of conſulting it; we enjoy the ſelf-ſame freedom, with all the rights & priviledges of exerciſing our Reaſon & Judgment.

3. In

3. In leſſer doubts, which we can eaſily determine, we are not uſed to go to any man for counſel: 'tis onely when we are a little puzzled, when we are uneaſy & perplext, 'tis onely then we have recourſe to thoſe who are commiſſion'd to direct us. When we begin to ſpell & pudder upon difficulties, whether we *may* or *may not*, whether we *ought* or *ought not*; when we plainly find our ſelves at a loſs, & know not how to ſatisfie our mind about the matter before us; when we begin to want a little help, & are glad with all our hearts to call for it: Pray tell me, is there any thing more reaſonable than to refer theſe doubtfull caſes to the arbitration of a Confeſſor, who is expreſſely deputed by God & his Church,

to judge for thoſe who are not capable of judging eaſily & clearly for themſelves? Is not his advice worth our taking, when 'tis worth our asking? When we know not how to chuſe for our ſelves, & therefore prudently reſolve to let our Confeſſor chuſe for us, Why ſhould we quarrel with the ſame Prudence for obliging us to approve his choice? It would be a ſtrange unreaſonable perverſeneſs indeed, if when we could not do the work our ſelves, we would not ſuffer any body elſe to do it for us.

When both parties are weary of an expenſive ſuit of Law, & by common conſent agree to make short work of it, & refer it to the arbitration of a neighbour; If it were your own caſe, & the Sentence were given

given againſt you, Would you preſently fly back from your bargain, & refuſe to ſtand to his Judgment? I am ſure no man of Honour would do it. In the ſame manner, when a caſe is doubtfull, when your ſpeculative reaſons are not able to decide it to your ſatisfaction, when you grow quite weary, & deſpair of ending the diſpute; you cannot think of any thing better, than to appeal to the Authority of your Confeſſor; nor can I think of any thing worſe, than to refuſe his Arbitration, when you had not onely accepted, but deſired, it. You know very well, that in any temporal matter, it would not be lookt upon as fair & honeſt dealing. What have you to ſay in your defence?

Is it fitting that I should ſubmit without a reaſon?

Pray, what reaſon had you to conſult him? Was it not becauſe you found your ſelf unſatisfied with all your own particular reaſons, and therefore wiſely abandon'd them to appeal to his Authority? If this were a good reaſon, to *appeal*; why is it not a good one, to *ſubmit*? Is it not a ſhame, to put ſuch an affront upon the Common Reaſon of mankind, as to uſe it like a bauble, onely fit for childrens-play? and to be always ſhifting backwards & forwards, firſt from reaſon to authority, & then from the the ſame authority to the ſame reaſon again? This is never the way to end any diſpute, but always the way to make it endleſs.

I do not fly back from Authority to my own reaſon, but onely am curious to know his reaſons, becauſe I believe they may be better than mine.

And yet, after all, if he ſhould tell you his reaſons, you would not be ſatisfied with them, till you had well examined them, & made them your own. His Authority would ſignifie nothing at all; nor his Reaſon neither, any further than your own reaſon approves it. So that, from the Authority which you appeal'd to, you manifeſtly fly back to your own reaſon again. The proudeſt creature in the world, would do as much as this: nor can you ſhew me the leaſt appearance of Chriſtian Humility, in this way of proceeding.

Well;

Well; but when I am once convinced, I shall be quiet ever after.

It ſeems you are vain enough to think ſo, in ſpite of all your dayly experience to the contrary. You know very well, that the *April*-Sun-shine is not more unconſtant, than the clearneſs of your reaſons. One moment they shine bright, & the next they are under a cloud. How often have you thought your ſelf convinc'd? How oft have you rejoyc'd at it, & thank'd your Confeſſor for it? and preſently after, you have been much more in pain, & more tormented than before. Your ſpeculations, which appear'd to be entirely routed, rallied up again with double forces of recruits, & with a fresh aſſault broke in upon your mind, ruffled

ruffled your thoughts, and riffled all the treaſure of your peace.

Tis very true; but I beg one anſwer more; onely to this one queſtion: and then I'm confident I ſhall be ſatisfied.

Tis a thouſand pities, you ſhould not be ſatisfied, upon ſuch eaſy terms. But pray, conſider how many thouſands of theſe *one-queſtions* you have had an anſwer to already; and all to no other purpoſe, than to render your condition dayly worſe & worſe. Reaſon to Scruples, is like Oyl to Fire: Water may put it out; but Oyl will rather feed it, & encreaſe the Flame.

Tis Charity in a Confeſſor, to inſtruct me: Is he not my Teacher, as well as my Judge?

Yes: And he is your *Judge* as

as well as your *Teacher*. His *Charity* does not oblige him, nor his *Prudence* permit him, to *teach* you any thing, but what he *judges* fitting for you. There are a great many truths, which are onely proper to feed your Curiosity, & very unfit to nourish Piety, much less, to improve your Humility. When your Confessor has judged the case, if you ask his reasons for it, & will not submit till you are thoroughly satisfied that he is certainly in the right; it is no longer He that judges for you: he onely instructs you, & helps you to judge for your self. To what purpose are you so inquisitive? Tis a thing not onely needless, but dangerous. For, 1. If it be usefull to you, he'l instruct you, of his own accord: 'tis his Duty

Duty ſo to do: and, if he does not, 'tis his fault, not yours. 2. Although his Conſcience tells him, that it is a great deal better & ſafer for you, not to know his reaſons: yet perhaps his complaiſance, or (if you pleaſe) his good nature, may incline him to hazard the peace of your Soul, by gratifying of your Curioſity: And then you are both to blame; you, for asking; he, for condeſcending.

If Reaſon be a good thing in it ſelf, why may I not ask it? And, if my Motive, of deſiring it, be alſo good, why may I not have it for asking?

You have already too much reaſon: you have a great deal more than you well know what to do with: and therefore, though it be good in it ſelf 'tis far from being good for you.

And

And truly, if it be not good for you, if you know not what to do with it, if you have already too much of it, I do not easily conceive what sort of good motive you can have, to wish for more.

I am very uneasy with fears & apprehensions of doing amiss: this uneasiness is a great hindrance to me, in my duties & devotions; and therefore I am always busy, either studying or enquiring, to find out a clear & certain reason, to secure me from all fear.

I understand you very well. You are like a Gentleman who was very uneasy for fear of wanting money. He thought that if once he could yet the Philosopher's Stone, it would change all things into Gold, and therefore was always busy in

in ſtudying how to find it out: but 'twas his misfortune, that the thing he ſought for, was not to be found. A *ſpeculative certainty* of the goodneſs & lawfullneſs of every particular action, & every circumſtance of it, would be a fine thing indeed, if it were to be had. But before you inquire any further after it, I beg you to conſider how manifeſtly impoſſible it is to diſſect one ſingle action into all its parts, and to read particular lectures of morality upon them, with as many demonſtrations to confirm the truth & the exactneſs of them all. 1. In one ſingle action, beſides the ſubſtance of it, our Divines obſerve no leſs than ſix or ſeven general circumſtances, as Perſon, Time, Place, Motive, Means, & Manner of doing.

The

The harmomy & due proportion of all theſe muſt firſt be well obſerved & clearly proved, before 'tis poſſible to form a ſpeculative Judgment of the Whole, eſpecially a certain one, which may exclude all fear. 2. Theſe general circumſtances are like ſpawners, and often have a great many little particular ones within them. 3. Even theſe little ones, which hardly are diſcernable by common eyes, may be diſſected too, & ſtill afford new matter for a Scene of fresh diſcoveries. 4. Some of theſe circumſtances, even thoſe of the greateſt importance, are ſuch thin vanishing things, that 'tis impoſſible for any body's thoughts to lay faſt hold of them. The Purity of our Intention, the Sincerity of our Endeavours, the Ex-

Exact proportion of our Diligence, &c, are things which all the natural Reaſon in the world is never able to demonſtrate. 5. Although the general Maxims of Morality are clear & evident, yet nevertheleſs the uſe & application of them oftentimes are hid & wrapt up in obſcurity & darkneſs. They are like thoſe ſubterraneous ſecrets which lie too deep for humane induſtry to reach them. The Art of Man can neither fetch them out, & place them in the open light: nor can it contrive a way to go & ſee them where they are; becauſe, in ſuch a deep deſcent, the Lamp burns blew immediatly, & ſoon goes out. Did you ever hear of a man ſo foolish, as to attempt the digging of a ſtaircaſe to the Center of the earth?

earth? Tis every jot as impoſſible to make a clear diſcovery of Secrets which lie hidden in the center of our Hearts.

Is not this enough to drive a fearfull Soul into Deſpair?

Tis very well, if it does ſo. Tis the very thing I would be at. *Deſpair* is not always bad; but ſometimes abſolutely neceſſary. Many a man has ruin'd a good eſtate, for want of a little deſpair. The Gentleman, I ſpoke of laſt, who was ſo fond of trying coſtly experiments, to find out the Philoſopher's Stone, if in good time he had deſpair'd of finding it, he might have ſaved his labour, & his eſtate too. The ſooner you deſpair, the better, provided you deſpair in the right place. There are many Souls in Heaven, who would never

never have been there, if they had not deſpair'd here. They would never have been ſo much in love with the next world, if they had not deſpair'd of being happy in this. They would never have pray'd ſo heartily & ſo devoutly for the aſſiſtance of God's grace, if they had not deſpair'd of being able to work their Salvation without it. And I verily believe that You your ſelf will never ſubmit ſo humbly, readily, & cheerfully, as you ought, to the Authority of your Confeſſor, till you deſpair entirely of ever finding any comfort in your own fantaſtical ſpeculations.

CHAP.

CHAP. X.

Pretences of Conſcience conſider'd.

TIs impoſſible for a Timorous Conſcience to be *quiet* without being *certain*. Tis alſo impoſſible, in the darkneſs of moral doubts, to find out any *ſpeculative certainty*. And conſequently it highly concerns us to conſider what *practical certainty* may be had, and to make the beſt markets we can of it.

I have, in the beginning of the laſt chapter, already obſerv'd; that in the deciſion of moral doubts our *ſpeculative* reaſons are always ſubordinate to the *practical* principles of our Prudence. Our ſpeculations have no right to any ſhare in the Govern-

Government of our lives, any further than our Prudential Reaſon, which always ought to have an inſpection over them, approves them as rules to walk by. They have onely a conſulting voice in all deliberations, *when* and *where* they are ſummon'd to appear: Our Soveraign Reaſon ſtill preſides in the Aſſembly: It determines all things, at its own diſcretion, not theirs: And, if they happen to grow tedious & impertinent, as oftentimes they are, it has the power to prorogue them, or diſſolve them, as it pleaſes; & decide the matter without them.

So that here are two paths before us, & onely two, which lead us to a *practical certainty*: the one, by way of ſpeculative reaſoning; the other, by

way of Authority: and the main question is; which of these two is best?

When we ground our practical certainty upon the probability of speculative reason, we commonly meet with some difficulty & danger by the way, before we come at it. A long examen oftentimes is necessary, to weigh each grain of probability; whether it be more than it need be, or less than it should be, or just gold-weight. Tis true; a man of sense & sound judgment, may make a very good shift to overcome the difficulty & the danger too: But how these troublesome circumstances will agree with the temper & constitution of a timorous Conscience, I do not so easily conceive.

On the other hand, when all

all our doubtfull & uncertain ſpeculations are laid aſide, and our practical certainty is grounded wholly & entirely upon the Authority of a Confeſſor; the caſe is quite alter'd: 'tis no longer, either difficult or dangerous. There's no examen requiſite: no weighing of Authority by grains: the leaſt commiſſion from God, & patent from his Church, is equally eaſy to be known, & equally ſecure to be relied upon. Tis a rule which never varies: 'tis applied the ſame way, to all doubts whatſoever: & the very *A*, *B*, *C*, of practical Reaſon, is enough to teach us the application of it. 1. *In all doubtfull caſes I may ſecurely relie upon my Confeſſor's Authority, without examining his reaſons.* 2. *My preſent difficulty is a doubt-*

full case: 3. And therefore, in my present difficulty, I may securely relie upon his Authority, without examining his reasons. This is the whole lesson: there is no need of any more: and 'tis a lesson so short & so plain that a body must be very dull indeed, who can be long in learning it. It includes onely three points: 1. the universal principle; 2. the application; and 3. the conclusion. The last follows evidently from its premises: the second cannot fail: the first is absolutely certain: And what can any reasonable person wish for more?

In the next chapter, I shall make it my business to prove by Scripture, the absolute certainty of it. Mean time I shall apply my self to consider the two sorts of practical certainty:

tainty: 1. in what they agree; 2. in what they differ; 3. which of the two is better, & more favourably calculated for the ease & comfort of a timorous Conscience.

SECT. I.

The two sorts of Practical Certainty explain'd.

THey both agree in being equally obscure, & leaving us in the dark, without satisfying us *whether or no* the *Action* or *Omission* be lawfull *in it self*. They onely undertake to assure us that whether it be lawfull *in it self* or not, 'tis certainly lawfull *to us*: and truly this is as much as a wise man would wish for, or a good man needs to care for. Wheth-

er or no it be lawfull *in it self*, is onely a *speculative* doubt; and the decision of it, is not necessary for our *practise*. Tis enough that we have done our duty in enquiring after it: and that we have either well consider'd the sufficient probability of our speculations, or more wisely consulted the sure Authority of our Confessor. This done; we are as *secure*, as we are *sincere*.

Although we are not *speculatively certain* of its being lawfull *in it self*; we are *practically certain* of its being lawfull *to us*. We hope the thing is lawfull *in it self*. If we knew for certain that it is not *so*, we would not do it. We have done what's fitting for a good Christian to do in doubtfull cases. More than this we are not obliged

ged to: And therefore we ſecurely lay aſide all further care. We are *practically certain* that, if we are miſtaken, we are not guilty of it. Our God, who ſees our hearts, is as well pleaſed with us, as if we had not been deceiv'd: He will not fail to reward the Sincerity of our good intentions: And when the Humility of blind Obedience goes along with them, they will be acceptable to him upon more accounts than one, and receive a double recompence.

SECT. II.

When we rely upon our Confeſſor's Authority, our Certainty is Abſolute.

ALthough both ſorts of practical certainty agree

in being equally obſcure, on the one ſide; they do not ſo well agree in being equally clear & comfortable, on the other: and the difference is the greater, becauſe it lies in the very foundation of them. The one is grounded upon the Probability of ſpeculative reaſon: the other upon the Authority of a Confeſſor: and betwixt theſe two the difference is greater than many people imagine.

When a Penitent judges for himſelf according to the Probability of his own ſpeculative reaſon, he muſt take great care to proceed prudently in his determinations. For,

1. If he be rash or negligent, if he uſe not the caution & circumſpection which is requiſite, if he do not well conſider the ſufficient probability of

of his reaſons, He is ſure to be guilty, whether the thing be lawfull *in it ſelf* or not. For, if it happen to be lawfull, 'tis better fortune than his Rashneſs deſerves: And, if it be unlawfull *in it ſelf*, 'tis certainly ſo *to him*, becauſe his Negligence, which he muſt one day anſwer for, can never juſtifie him in it. He may thank himſelf for being miſtaken: 'tis his own fault, that he is ſo: and 'tis impoſſible for one fault to be a juſt excuſe for another.

2. If he be partial in examining the probability of his opinion, if any criminal inclination make him more attentive to the one ſide than the other, if he have not patience, to conſider the full ſtrength of the reaſons againſt him, but

chiefly apply the whole force of his wit, to magnifie the reasons which are favourable to his Passion, Interest, or Humour; his Blindness is willfull: and all the world agrees, that willfull Ignorance is no excuse. Tis a common case, which dayly happens. We frequently take notice of it, & clearly see it, in our neighbours, though we are not willing to observe it in our selves. But the more common it is, the greater is our obligation to consider the difficulty & the danger to which a Penitent is always exposed, when he pretends to judge for himself, & to build his *practical certainty* upon the sandy ground of his own probable reasons, without removing the rubbish, & examining well the foundation,

before

before he ventures to raiſe his edifice upon it.

He who builds upon a rock, is free from all this trouble. He needs not dig deep to ſearch a foundation, which (without examining) he knows to be as firm as he can wish it. Such is the advantage of that *practical certainty* which is grounded upon the Authority of a Confeſſor. And to confirm this truth, which is of ſuch importance to all Penitents, I have amongſt our Doctors & Divines made choice of one beyond exception, who not onely teaches it himſelf, but ſays it is the common doctrine of the reſt. He propoſes, & proves, three duties of Blind Obedience, from whence I have drawn three general rules, which are undoubtedly as

lawfull & as commendable in *ſecular* Penitents, as in *religious* Perſons; whoſoever is the *Superior* of the one, or *Confeſſor* of the other.

I. *Although* (a) *in general we know* our Confeſſor *may be miſtaken; yet, in particular, we never are to ſuppoſe He is ſo, unleſs we are CERTAIN of it.* If therefore we are not *certain* of his being in the wrong, we may lawfully ſuppoſe, he is in the right: and by conſequence,

II. We need not (b) *ſearch into*

(a) Etiamſi abſolutè falli poſſit Superior, id tamen non eſt unquam in particulari præſumendum, niſi de eo conſtet. *Leſſius* de Juſt. & Jure. lib. 2. cap. 46. dub. 5. (b) Debet eſſe cœca ad rationes præcepti ſcrutandas; nempe ut non velit ſcire cauſas cur quid præcipiatur; ſed ſatis ei ſit, præcipi vel imponi ab eo qui locum Dei tenet, nec conſtet per ſe eſſe illicitum, *ibid.*

into his reaſons, nor *know the cauſes, why he bids us* follow his advice. Becauſe, if we may lawfully ſuppoſe him in the right, 'tis evident we need not be inquiſitive about the matter, for fear of his being in the wrong. And hence it follows alſo, that

III. We need not (*c*) *conſider his imperfections & his faults; nor be therefore leſs ready to obey him.* Becauſe although his Ignorance or Negligence may poſſibly miſlead him, yet, ſince 'tis none of our buſineſs to enquire about it, we are every jot as ſafe, as if an Angel came from Heaven to aſſure us of his being in the right.

If

(*c*) Cæca ad imperfectiones & vitia Superioris, ut hæc non conſideret, nec ob hæc minus ad obediendum parata ſit; ſed ſolum conſideret eum cujus locum tenet. *ibidem.*

If you ask me, Why then does *S. F. Sales* adviſe us (*d*) *to chuſe one amongſt ten thouſand?* Why does he tell us, *he muſt be replenish'd with Charity, Knowledge, & Prudence*: & that *if one of theſe three parts be wanting in him, there is danger?* How ſhall we *chuſe* a Confeſſor, without *conſidering his imperfections & his faults?* The Anſwer to all this, is eaſily found in the ſame chapter.

1. When *B. Sales* ſpeaks of *chuſing one in ten thouſand*, he no more intends that we ſhould enter into a ſtrict examen of our Confeſſor's capacity, than he means that we ſhould abſtain from Confeſſion, till we have ten thouſand Confeſſors at our ſervice. The *number* and the *choice* are neither of them to

(*d*) *Introduct.* part. 1. ch. 4. n. 5.

to be underſtood in the rigour of the expreſſion: becauſe it would then follow, that none but ſome few Soveraign Princes could ever be able to go to Confeſſion, for want of *number* enough to *chuſe* in. But nevertheleſs, this way of expreſſing is very proper to undeceive ſome people, who are not at all ſollicitous what Confeſſor they have; provided he be a man for their purpoſe, a man of their own humour, or a man who is eaſily prevail'd with, to let them do as they pleaſe. As for his *Charity*, they do not deſire it; his *Knowledge*, they do not want it; & his *Prudence* alſo may be ſpared, becauſe they have enough of their own. To oppoſe this pernicious maxim, our Saint aſſures us, *there are fewer to be found*

found than men imagine, who are fit & capable of such an Office; & that there is danger, if by our fault *these parts are wanting in him*; that is, if we purposely make choice of a man, for this very reason, because we believe him deficient in these excellent Qualities, & because we are so proud & willfull that we cannot endure to deal with a man whose *Knowledge* and *Prudence* may enable him to *direct* us, or a man whose *Charity* may easily inspire him with sufficient courage, when he is obliged, to *contradict* us. They who know their Passions are strong, & think their Reason is so too, are little desirous of being directed, & less of being contradicted. And therefore *B. Sales* takes

takes notice that (e) *one of the laſt advices of the great S.* Lewis *to his Son, was in this kind: Confeſs often, & chuſe a Confeſſor of learning & diſcretion, that can & dares advertiſe thee, to do ſuch things as are neceſſary for thy Salvation.* If all the world would follow this advice, there would not be ſo many as there are, who purpoſely avoid thoſe Confeſſors *who can & dare advertiſe* them. Their ignorance, when they miſtake, is willfull & cannot excuſe them: but on the contrary, they deſerve to be abandon'd in their darkneſs, becauſe they purpoſely took care to avoid the light.

2. *B. Sales* ſays not one ſyllable of a Penitent's being obliged to make a ſtrict enquiry into

(e) *ibid.* n. 1.

into the Knowledge Charity & Prudence of a Confeſſor. He knew very well that ſuch a method would expoſe them to an infinity of rash judgments, & that God would never give a bleſſing to ſuch a way of proceeding. Tis true; we cannot help ſeeing & hearing: neither can we avoid thinking of what we ſee & hear: and, if the appearances are very great, we may make a reaſonable uſe of them, by way of a prudent caution: we may wiſely & ſafely chuſe the man who ſeems the better qualified & fitter for the Office: but all this while, we need not form a peremptory judgment in the caſe; and after all, we may perhaps be grievouſly miſtaken in the matter. For which reaſon *B. Sales* is ſo far from adviſing us to

conſider well the faults & imperfections of a Confeſſor, before we chuſe him, that he onely ſends us to our prayers, to (f) *demand him inſtantly at the hands of Almighty God*; and, *having once obtain'd him*, he bids us *bleſs his Divine Majeſty for ſo great a benefit.* He tells us, that the way to find a good Confeſſor, is to (g) *fear God, & with an humble mind affectuouſly deſire our advancement in Piety.* He tells us, that we ought to *pray to God with very great inſtance*, to *furniſh us with one according to his heart.* He tells us moreover, for our comfort, that, *although it were needfull to ſend an Angel from Heaven, as he did to young* Tobias, *he will* not fail to ſupply our want; but

(f) *ib.* n. 5. (g) *ib.* n. 3.

but that *he will* undoubtedly *give* us *a good & faithfull Guide.*

3. He expreſſely teaches, that we (*h*) *ought to hearken to* our *Confeſſor*, *as to an Angel deſcended from Heaven, to conduct* us *thither*: And any man who has his thoughts about him, muſt needs perceive that, if this be true, the rules of *Leſſius* cannot poſſibly be falſe. For, if we were once aſſured of an *Angel* being ſent from Heaven to direct us,

I. We never could ſuppoſe that God, who ſent him, had permitted him to *miſtake* his meſſage, *unleſs we were CERTAIN of it.*

II. The reſpect we owe to an Ambaſſador from Heaven, would not ſuffer us to queſtion any

(*h*) *ib. n. 4.*

any of his orders, by *ſearching into the reaſons* & endeavouring to *know the cauſes* of them.

III. Though *nothing* be *good* & perfect *but God*, yet nevertheleſs it would be a very abſurd thing, if we were *therefore leſs ready to obey him*, becauſe, with curious obſervation, we may poſſibly diſcover *imperfections*, even in an *Angel*.

My veneration for *S. F. Sales* has led me a great deal further than I firſt intended: but however it has not led me out of my way; becauſe I was going to prove, that the *practical certainty* which is grounded upon the ſure Authority of a Confeſſor, is *abſolute*; without requiring any terms on our ſide to ſupport it: whereas the other, which is grounded upon the

the Probability of ſpeculative reaſon, is onely *conditional*, and always ſuppoſes ſome certain articles to be obſerved exactly on our part; ſo that *if* we fail in the performance of theſe conditions, all our appearances of practical certainty will never be ſufficient to excuſe us.

SECT. III.

When we depend upon the Probability of our own Reaſon, our Certainty is onely Conditional.

IN the laſt Section I compared that *practical certainty*, which is grounded upon a Confeſſor's Authority, to a building which is raiſed upon a rock: But as for the other, which is grounded upon Probability, I cannot

cannot compare it better than to a building erected upon a floating iſland. Such an edifice, may be made as ſtrong as one pleaſes, & as well compacted in it ſelf: but the foundation is naturally a little ſuſpicious; it may break; it may ſink; and either the one, or the other, is enough to ruine the inhabitants. If the Foundation never fall to pieces, if it never be ſwallow'd up; All's well. But how ſhall a body do to be thoroughly ſatisfied concerning theſe matters? Such *if*'s as theſe are a little troubleſome to a man's thoughts; and very well deſerve to be conſider'd, before one ventures to dwell in ſuch a wandring & uncertain habitation.

For the better underſtanding of the whole matter, I ſhall endea-

endeavour to give a short and familiar account of the common notions of Probability. There are two sorts of it: the one, intrinsecal; the other, extrinsecal: Intrinsecal Probability is when we consider the *real merits* of the *cause*, the principles & consequences of it, the arguments & reasons which have a particular relation to it, or a natural connexion with it. Extrinsecal Probability is when we have no regard to any of these things, but onely consider the *personal merits* of the *author* who has credit with us. We have some particular reasons, best known to our selves, which make us think him wise & good, and the greater the appearances are of his being *wise* enough to *know* the truth, &

& *good* enough to *tell* it us ſincerely, the greater is the probability of his doctrine being true, & the more we are contented to rely upon it, without enquiring into the reaſons of it. We ſuppoſe his reaſons are *good*, becauſe they are *his*, And becauſe his *perſonal merits* are altogether forreign to the *merits of the cauſe*, therefore this ſort of probability is call'd extrinſecal.

When I ſpeak of *authors*, I mean *books* as well as *men*, For we converſe with both, and value them more or leſs, according as we fancy they deſerve it. Some there are, who are much inclined to prefer the *dead* authors before the *living* ones: But I am much afraid, they have no great reaſon for it. A *book*, ſay they, is free

from paſſion intereſt & humour. Very true, it is ſo: and ſo is the *man* himſelf, when he is dead: But he was alive, when he was writing; and, for ought we know, his paſſion intereſt & humour might be then alive, as well as he. Be it how it will, I am ſure the *living* authors have ſome very conſiderable advantages over the *dead* ones. 1. The *living* can ſpeak for themſelves; and, if they are not rightly underſtood, they can explain the difficulty more clearly. The *dead* can ſpeak no more; and, if we do not underſtand the text, they are not now in a capacity of putting a comment in the margent. 2. We may acquaint a *living* author with the particular circumſtances of our caſe; but a *dead* one has no

ears

ears to hear us. We may read his writings, and obſerve what general doctrines he lays down before us: But, as there are few rules without ſome exceptions, we may ſtill be in a doubt; and, if we are, he is not able to reſolve us. So that upon the whole matter, there appears to be as much difference, as betwixt a Doctor & a Diſpenſatory. And I am very confident, that ſeveral people have loſt their lives by tampering with Diſpenſatories, who otherwiſe might have enjoy'd both life & health, if they had but, in time, conſulted their Doctor. In fine, whether the *Author* be living or dead, 'tis certain that we either conſider the merit of his reaſons, or the merit of his perſon. If we relie upon the merit of his arguments,

having examin'd them, poſſeſs'd them, & made them our own, our probability is what they call *intrinſecal*. But if we wave his reaſons, & rely entirely upon the merit his perſon, becauſe we are perſwaded that a *wiſe* man is not eaſily miſtaken, nor a *good* man eaſily prevail'd upon to tell a lie, our probability is meerly *extrinſecal*.

Let us now apply theſe notions to our preſent purpoſe. Tis certainly lawfull to follow a probable opinion: and, whether the probability be intrinſecal or extrinſecal, 'tis no great matter, provided it be ſufficient. We are are onely obliged to look before we leap, and to conſider well the ground before we offer to go upon it. I have already explain'd the difficulty of

of examining, & the danger of chuſing our opinion: I have alſo intimated, that any judicious perſon may eaſily make a very good ſhift to overcome the difficulty & the danger too; in confirmation of which, I ſhall onely add one plain reflection. We are not obliged to uſe any extraordinary care & diligence in conſidering & ſearching the probability of our opinion: 'tis enough that we proceed with the ſame ſeriousneſs & induſtry of endeavour, which we commonly uſe in worldly affairs, ſuch as are of ſome importance to us. For example: If we ſeek truth with the ſame ardour & vigour, as we ſeek a temporal advantage; if we go to look for it, with as good a will as men go uſually to their markets or their fairs; if we are

in as good earneſt, and as carefull about it, as we are in driving a bargain; if we reject the plauſible ſuggeſtions of our paſſion, intereſt, or humour, as we do the flattering words & kind inſinuations of a perſon whom we verily believe to have a deſign of over-reaching us: If we do but this (and all this is no more than what we dayly do) We need not fear: We are Secure.

Whenſoever a man has done as much as I have here deſcribed, the *lawfullneſs* of following his opinion is very *certain*, although the *truth* of it be onely *probable*. He has a *practical certainty* that the thing is lawfull *to him*, although he onely has a *ſpeculative probability* of its being lawfull *in it ſelf*. And this alone is enough to

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pacifie the minds of all conſiderate perſons : for they will eaſily aſſure themſelves of having done as much as I have here explain'd ; and then , although their certainty be onely *conditional*, yet being well aſſured of having perform'd the conditions , they are as ſafe & as much at eaſe , as if their certainty were *abſolute.*

But it is not ſo with ſcrupulous people who are always more or leſs confounded & amaz'd with too much fear. Nothing but an *abſolute* certainty will do their work , a *conditional* one will never ſerve their turn. Neither is it any wonder , that Scrupuloſity and Probability can never agree ; becauſe Probability is naturally more or leſs defective, & Scru-

pulosity is always so uneasy, so exceptious, so unreasonable in its expectations, that it is impossible to please it. Tis a peevish sort of Humour, which is always finding fault, & always suspecting the worst; and when things are as well as they need be, it quarrels with them because they are not better than they can be. In these occasions, Probability is blamed, without deserving it. For, in moral doubts where speculative certainty is not to be found, a reasonable probability is as much as the matter will bear, 'tis as much as all our speculations can discover, and therefore is a very good thing in it self. But, as good as it is, it is not so good as Scrupulosity would have it be. Scrupulosity would fain be speculatively certain

tain; & Probability can never be so: and therefore they can never agree upon the point. Now, for my part, I cannot but look upon this, as a very extravagant humour: For, although a man may possibly be so covetous, as to wish he could make a groat of two-pence; yet however, 'tis evidently an unreasonable thing, to refuse a good two-pence, because it is not worth a groat.

If scrupulous people could possibly content themselves with a reasonable proportion of Probability, there might be some hopes of their finding comfort in it. But they are so excessively fond of *certainty*, that they can never rest without it; and would be almost ready to die with despair, if they did not live in hopes of it. For this reason,

they are ſo very buſy in ſearching for the *greateſt* probability, as being the neareſt to it: and indeed they are not to be blamed for thinking that the *greateſt* is the *beſt*: but, on the contrary, they very much deſerve to be commended for being moſt pleaſed with it, and for making it part of their chief buſineſs to find it. But the truth is, all exceſs is blameable, even in things the moſt excellent: and the juſteſt cauſe in the world can never juſtifie the intemperance of any paſſion in the proſecution of it. Their fault lies in their being over-much concern'd, & being blinded with too much fear; which undoubtedly diſpleaſes God, as much as a loving confidence would pleaſe him. They are like a man, whoſe maſter

ſends

ſends him to the wood; *Go, fetch me*, ſays he, *the beſt ſtick you can find.* If he had ſaid, *a good one*, the work had been eaſily done: but becauſe he ſaid, *the beſt*, therefore the poor man is ſo terribly afraid, he ſcarce knows where to turn himſelf: firſt, one ſtick pleaſes him: and then another; and another: the more variety he meets with, the more he is confounded with it; and, the more he is ſollicitous to chuſe the *beſt*, the leſs he is able to do it. Thus he wanders up & down, loſes his labour, loſes his patience, loſes himſelf; and, by the time that he has found himſelf again, he has loſt his Maſters favour, by ſtaying ſo very long, & chuſing the worſt ſtick at laſt.

This immoderate ſollicitude

were yet more pardonable, if when they find the probability they ſeek for, they would perſwade themſelves to be contented with it. But the ſame cowardly Spirit which puzzles them in the purſuit of it, does as much diſcourage them even when they think they have found it. When they have overtaken it, & ſee it fall quite ſhort of their beloved certainty, they reckon all their labour loſt, & are as much unſatisfied as ever. They are utterly diſappointed in their expectation. They thought to arrive at ſpeculative certainty by the way of probability: But they onely wearied themſelves with trying the experiment, & found themſelves as much miſtaken, as little children are, who looking upwards from the bottom of

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a great mountain, are apt to imagine 'tis as high as Heaven; & that, if they were once at the top of it, they could touch the Skie with their hands: Pleas'd with the fancy, they reſolve to try: but the higher they climb, the leſs hopes they have, & when they come there, they find the Skie as much above their heads as ever.

'Tis in vain to tell ſuch ſcrupulous perſons that, although *Innocent* XI. has condemn'd the (*i*) *leaſt* probability, yet *Alexander* VIII. has approved the (*k*) *greateſt*. Nor is it to any purpoſe

(*i*) Generatim dum probabilitate, ſive intrinſecâ, ſive extrinſecâ, quantumvis tenui, modò à probabilitatis finibus non exeatur, confiſi aliquid agimus, ſemper prudenter agimus. *Prop.* 3. *inter* 65. (*k*) Non licet ſequi opinionem, vel inter probabiles probabiliſſimam. *Prop.* 3. *inter* 31.

purpoſe to talk to them of a middle way, & to let them know there are degrees of *greater* & *leſſer* betwixt the two extreams of *leaſt* and *greateſt*. If you tell them that, although the *leſſer* be warmly diſputed, yet both parties are agreed that the *greater* is ſufficient. All this will never pacifie their minds: becauſe the *greateſt* probability is always mixt with ſome little degree of uncertainty; and this uncertainty though never ſo little, is a breach which they find wide enough for thouſands of fears to enter, & rush in upon them. Their fears are as unaccountable as thoſe of little children, who are terrified with wonderfull ſtories of Apparitions & Spirits: though you ſhut the door as cloſe as ever you can, yet if once they get

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a fancy in their head, that the bug-bears can creep in at the key-hole, they'l quake and tremble as much, as if the door were wide open.

Tis no leſs in vain to aſſure them that, although the caſe in queſtion *may be* ſinfull & unlawfull *in it ſelf*, yet having taken ſuch pains to find the truth, it is impoſſible that this *may-be* ſhould ever do them the leaſt harm: becauſe, although their probability falls ſhort of ſpeculative certainty, yet shey are *practically certain* that the caſe is innocent & lawfull *to them*, *if* they have not been *negligent* in examining it, or *if* they have not been *partial* in approving it. A Security upon doubtfull conditions, is no ſecurity at all; and the conditions here ſpecified, are always doubtfull to them.

them. Alas! They never think themſelves ſufficiently *Sincere & Diligent*: and therefore theſe *if*'s can never comfort them, becauſe theſe *if*'s are the very things they are ſo much afraid of. Their firſt apprehenſions are, that the thing perhaps *may be* unlawfull *in it ſelf*. Afterwards, when they begin to aim at a *conditional* certainty, & to conſider well the aforeſaid *if*'s; their fears are now doubled, inſtead of their being double-guarded from them. They are now allarm'd with fresh recruits of new-rais'd reaſons, which aſſault them in two ſeveral places at once, and with greater numbers than before. And now their thoughts are buſy & uneaſy with endleſs doubts & ſuſpicions, that *may-be* they have been *negligent*, &

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may-be they have been *partial.* So that all the comfort, which their *conditional* certainty affords them, ſerves onely to furnish them with *two may-be's* inſtead of *one*: which is juſt a down-right Tinkering of the matter, by mending *one* hole, & making *two* in the place of it. And therefore I need not add a word more, to prove that the *abſolute* practical certainty, which is grounded upon the ſure Authority of a Confeſſor, is the better certainty of the two, and much more favourably calculated for the eaſe & comfort of a Timorous Conſcience.

SECT.

SECT. IV.

Objections of pretended Conſcience anſwer'd.

TIs high time now to anſwer the objections of pretended Conſcience. I call it it *pretended*, becauſe it goes by a name which it does not really deſerve, a name is none of its own. Tis a *pretence* which people make uſe of, when they have a mind to *think* what they *will*, and *do* what they *pleaſe*. A *pretence*, by which they cheat themſelves, as well as their neighbours; and endeavour to avoid private remorſes, as well as publick cenſures, by calling upon the ſacred name of *Conſcience*.

The main Objection, which gives

gives ground to all the reſt, is this. *Although the practiſe be lawfull in it ſelf, yet, if I* think really *it is a Sin, my* thinking ſo *is it not enough to* make *it a Sin?*

In anſwer to this, I frankly own, that *Conſcience*, rightly underſtood, is the true Judge of our Actions: but ſcrupulous perſons are grievouſly miſtaken in it. All their ſpeculations paſs for *Conſcientious*: all their upſtart fancies uſurp the title of *Conſcience*: Humility, Obedience, & all the train of Vertues which attend them, muſt now & then be turn'd out of doors, to make room for a Sin-making thought, which they are pleas'd to dignifie with the venerable Character of *Conſcience*. The Government of Reaſon would be a pretty ſort of

of a thing indeed, if every thought, which occurs to our mind, were the right rule of our morality. It would be just like a non-sensical Monarchy, where every body is King *de jure*. Tis true; our Conscience is always our immediate Judge: but then there is scarce one *thought* in a hundred, which is really our *Conscience*: and, if they are not our Conscience, 'tis no matter *what* they are, or *how many*. There may arise in our minds a thousand of them (if you please) one after another; and every one of these *thoughts* may *really think* it *is a Sin*; and yet, if *it is not* a Sin *in it self*, these *thoughts* will never be able to *make* it *a Sin*.

Well. But how shall I discern that thought, *which is my* Con-

Conſcience, *from all thoſe which are not?*

How do you know the difference betwixt the *Judge* who ſits upon the Bench, & the *Lawyers* who plead at the Bar, We have every one of us a Court of *Judicature* within us, where all our doubtfull caſes are try'd & judg'd. All our *thoughts* which are concern'd in any thing belonging to the *Trial*, are ſummon'd to appear in *Court*. Our *ſpeculative Thoughts* are the *Lawyers*, which open the Caſe, explain the circumſtances of it, & propoſe the reaſons which are either for it or againſt it. Whilſt the matter is thus under debate our *Thoughts* are divided upon the point: One way, they plead *it is a Sin*; the other way, they plead *it is not*. Mean time,

time, these *thoughts* are meerly *speculative*; because they are not rules to walk by, but are onely the opinion of the *Lawyers*, whose business is to *dispute* the question, & not to *decide* it. Amongst all the *Thoughts* which are employ'd in the whole Trial, there is onely *One*, which finally determines & judges the Case. This *Thought* is *practical*, because it is the *Opinion* of the *Judge*, the *Sentence* of the *Court*, & the *Rule* of our *Practise*. And *This* is the onely *Thought* which deserves the name of *Conscience*.

I purposely make use of this Allusion, to avoid School-terms; because I write for those who commonly are not well acquainted with them. And, for the better understanding of the main point, I shall endeavour to give

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a familiar account of three general caſes which uſually occur in the aforeſaid Trial.

I. It happens ſometimes, that the Lawyers, who plead *it is a Sin*, are able to prove it ſo plauſibly, and with ſuch ſtrong appearance of Reaſon, that the adverſe party is quite confounded and ſilenc'd. And then indeed, the Court being free from noiſe, the *Judge*'s voice may eaſily be heard: and we may be aſſur'd it is our *Conſcience* which tells us, *it is* certainly *a Sin.*

II. Sometimes it happens that the *Lawyers*, who plead it *lawfull*, have the greater probability on their ſide: But yet the others are obſtinate in maintaining the probability of its being *a Sin.* In this occaſion, there is a great noiſe in Court:

Court : The *Judge* pronounces *ſentence*, that the thing *is lawfull* : The *Lawyers* are impertinent, & the ſame time cry, *it is a Sin* : And in this confuſion we may eaſily miſtake a *Lawyer*'s voice, & think it is the *Judge*'s. Our *Conſcience* thinks it *lawfull* : and at the ſame time theſe unmannerly *Thoughts* continue clamorous, & ſtill *think really* it is *a Sin*. But let them ſtill *think* on ; as long, & as *really*, as they pleaſe ; 'tis certain they are never able to make it *really* be one.

III. At other times it commonly happens, that the *Lawyers*, who plead it *lawfull*, although they have great Probability on their ſide, yet they do not inſiſt upon it : they wave all probable reaſons, as being more

more or leſs defective: & onely ground their defence upon a *practical principle*, which is an undoubted maxim of the Law, that *in all doubtfull caſes one may ſecurely relie upon a Confeſſor's Authority, without examining* the *reaſons*. In this caſe, the *Lawyers*, who plead *it is a Sin*, are baffled & quite put out of countenance. As for *ſpeculative certainty*, which now is neceſſary to gain their point, they frankly own they have it not about them; And, as for *probability*, although they have abundance of it, yet the beſt being manifeſtly *uncertain*, the others deſpiſe it, & will not take the pains to anſwer it, but onely oppoſe the *certain rule* of a Confeſſor's *Authority* againſt it. When things are in this poſture, the Trial is ſoon

ended. Our *Conſcience* immediatly pronounces *Sentence*, that the thing *is certainly lawfull*: and the Equity of this Sentence is ſo viſible, that 'tis impoſſible to be miſtaken in it.

According to theſe three caſes, 'tis eaſy to give a short & plain Anſwer to the Queſtion here propoſed: *If I* think really *it is a Sin*, *is not my* thinking ſo *enough to make it a Sin?*

1. In the *firſt* caſe, you *think* 'tis *certainly a Sin*; you do not doubt the leaſt but that it is ſo: And then indeed, although it be not a Sin *in it ſelf*, This *thought*, as long as it continues *thus* certain, *is enough to make it one.*

2. In the *ſecond* caſe, you have two *thoughts* in your mind at once: one way, you think it

it *lawfull*; the other way, you think it *a Sin*: And, if the firſt *Thought* be your *Conſcience*, the ſecond cannot make it a Sin. But if you are not able to diſcern, which of the two *thoughts* is the dictate of your *Conſcience*, you muſt be content to ſuffer the *mortification* of being in a *doubt*, whether it be *enough* to make *it a Sin*, or not. But you have ſtill this comfort left, that

3. In the *third* caſe, when you lay aſide all theſe uncertain probabilities, and ground your ſelf entirely upon the ſure Authority of your Confeſſor, This *mortifying doubt* is eaſily and clearly reſolv'd. For, whilſt your *Conſcience* relies upon the *certainty* of his Authority who tells you *it is lawfull*, 'tis manifeſt that all your oth-

er *thoughts* can never be *enough to make it a Sin.* They may be clamorous, they may be troubleſome, they may affright you with more or leſs probability of its being *unlawfull*: But as long as you rely upon a *certain rule*, which always is a juſt excuſe, & always makes your practice *certainly* lawfull *to you*; What ſignifie the vain appearances of *probability*, which always is *uncertain*, and never can amount to more than this, that *perhaps* 'tis really unlawfull *in it ſelf*? Will any body in their right ſenſes, quit a *certain* hold, to faſten upon a meer *perhaps*?

But may I then ſafely follow my Confeſſor's Advice, when my own opinion ſeems to me more probable?

Who doubts it? His Advice

is a *certain* rule: your opinion contrary to it, though never ſo probable, is ſtill *uncertain*: And therefore 'tis an undoubted Truth, that you may (*l*) ſafely follow his advice.

But what if I am ſtill uneaſy in my ſelf, & terribly afraid it is a Sin? May I ſecurely follow

(*l*) Parum refert quod oppoſita ſententia ipſi operanti videatur probabilior ſpeculativè: Speculativum enim illud judicium, eo ipſo quod fortè *incertum* & falſum ſit, non debet eſſe regula operationis; cum operans aliam regulam, eamque *certam* habeat, quam ſequatur, *Buſenbaum.* l. 1. tr. 1. c. 2. dub. 2. Quando Religioſus dubitat utrum ſua infirmitas ſufficiat ad non jejunandum, vel ad non legendum horas; non ſolum ad mandatum, ſed etiam *conſilium* ſui Prælati *ſecurè* poteſt abſtinere a jejunio, vel ab horis. *Sylvius.* in 1. 2. q. 19. a 5. d. 8. c. 1. Prælato præcipienti Religioſus *tenetur* obedire contra ſuam propriam opinionem, etiamſi *probabiliorem.* ibid. d. 9. c. 4.

his Advice; in ſpite of all my fears?

Undoubtedly you may. Is it not evident, that we may always follow a *certain rule*, in ſpite of all the *uncertainties* in the world? And have not we juſt reaſon to (*m*) contemn our fears, when we are ſure of being more afraid than hurt?

My fears, you'l ſay, *are grounded upon a great many particular reaſons: And is it not an unreaſonable thing to turn theſe reaſons out of doors, without firſt confuting them?*

Pray, is it not an unreaſonable thing to undertake the needleſs labour of an endleſs work? Are they not abundantly

(m) Poteſt firmiter operari *contempto* ſcrupulo, etiamſi *perſeveret*, *Suarez.* in 1. 2. diſp. 12. ſect. 4. n. 5.

ly *confuted* by their own confeſſion? They onely boaſt their *probability*; they do not ſo much as pretend to a *ſpeculative certainty*: And nothing leſs than *that* can ever be allow'd to take place of a *certain* practical direction.

The whole truth of the buſineſs is this. Our *ſpeculative thoughts* are proud and impertinent. They would fain uſurp the whole conduct of our life & actions: and This is what they were never made for. They are like a factious Houſe of Commons, who are always quarrelling with the King's Prerogatives, under the odious name of Arbitrary Power: and if care be not taken to keep them within their due limits, they'l ſoon ſubvert the Government: they'l convene without

being call'd, and continue ſitting even when they are prorogued. From whence it plainly follows, that our *Practical Reaſon* is never more Prudent, and more like it ſelf, in the lawfull exerciſe of its Soveraign Power, than when it ſilences and diſmiſſes theſe pragmatical Scruples & rebellious Speculations, which cannot endure to have *Authority* reign over them. Then it is that our Practical Reaſon is like an Abſolute Monarch, who governs as he pleaſes, without conſulting his Parliament. And here, I hope you will not ſay, that *Reaſon* is *Tyrannical*, unleſs you have a mind to have it ſaid, that *Tyranny* is *reaſonable*.

CHAP.

CHAP. XI.

The Security of Blind Obedience proved by Scripture.

A Pretended Conſcience which claims a *liberty* of *thinking* what it pleaſes, & pleads a *neceſſity* of *doing* what it thinks, is as miſchievous a Tool as the Devil himſelf would wish to go to work with. All the Laws of God & his Church would ſignifie juſt nothing, if every body might pretend to ſay, *My Conſcience tells me another thing*, and *Who ſhall controll or judge my Conſcience?* Tis evident that whenſoever the *Law* ſays one thing, & our *pretended Conſcience* takes upon it to ſay another, or whenſoever there ariſes any

diſpute, which of the two is in the right, We do not live in conformity to the *Law*, if we *deſpiſe* ſuch *Judges* of the Law, as the Law it ſelf has appointed.

My buſineſs therefore at preſent is to prove by *Scripture*, that *our Confeſſors are appointed by God, to be the Judges of the Law.* From whence 'twill clearly follow, that *in all doubtfull caſes we may ſecurely relie upon our Confeſſors Authority, without examining their reaſons.* For ſurely nothing can be more ſelf-evident than this, that *the Law of God can never punish us, for ſubmitting humbly & ſincerely to thoſe Judges, which God himſelf has appointed.*

There are ſeveral Texts of *Scripture* which plainly repreſent unto us, how unfitting & how

how unſafe a thing it is, to take upon us to be our own judges in all things. (*n*) *Rely not upon your own Underſtanding: Be not wiſe in your own eyes.* And again (*o*) *There is more hope of a fool, than of one that is wiſe in his own conceit.* Such expreſſions as theſe are very proper to awaken ſome people, who are ſo ſtrangely fond of their own fancies, that they cannot endure to ſubmit them to any Confeſſor whatſoever. They love dearly to *rely upon their own underſtanding* in every thing, although the Word of God expreſſely adviſes the contrary. They are ſo *Wiſe in their own eyes*, that they never think their Confeſſor wiſe enough to direct them. And, let them ſay what

(n) *Prov.* 3. 5. 7. (o) *Prov.* 26. 12.

they will, 'tis manifeſt they are not guilty of too much Humility. For, if they thought their *conceits* were *ſilly*, they would eaſily ſubmit. But the true reaſon why they are ſo ſtiff in their opinions, is becauſe they always are inclined to believe that their *conceits* are *wiſe* ones. And how does this agree with the Word of God, which in (*p*) both Teſtaments admoniſhes them not to be *wiſe in their own conceits?* But a word is enough to the *wiſe*; and therefore I ſhall ſay no more upon this ſubject, but ſhall chiefly inſiſt upon thoſe Texts, which tell us plainly who they are, whom God has appointed to be our Guides & Judges: our Guides, to chuſe our way, & our Judges to determine all our doubts concerning it. I.

(p) *Prov.* 26. 12. *Rom.* 12. 16.

I. *The* (q) *lips of the Prieſt ſhall keep Knowledge, and they ſhall ſeek the Law at his mouth: for he is the Angel of the Lord of Hoſts.* And the reaſon holds good, although his wickedneſs (which God forbid) ſhould (r) *make* him *contemptible before the people.* His perſonal failings do not leſſen the Authority of his Character. He may *know* the Law as well as thoſe who *obſerve* it. And although his actions diſcover the corruption of his *Heart* which contradicts his *Judgment*, yet perhaps he may not labour under any temptation of belying the Law with his *lips*, or contradicting it with his *mouth*. In the old Teſtament we read that (s) *when Samuel was old*

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(q) *Malach.* 2. 7. (r) *ib.* v. 9. (s) 1. *Kings.* 8. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

& *made his Sons Judges over Iſrael, they walk'd not in his ways*; for which reaſon *the Elders of Iſrael*, being offended at the wickedneſs of his Sons, *gather'd themſelves together, and came to Samuel, & ſaid, Now make us a King to judge us, like all the Nations.* Whereupon *Samuel*, being *diſpleaſed* with their petition, *prayd* to God to direct him, & God himſelf expreſs'd his diſpleaſure in theſe terms, *They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I ſhould not reign over them.* And in the New Teſtament we read, that *Jeſus ſaid to the multitude* (t) *The Scribes & Phariſees have ſitten in Moſes ſeat; All therefore whatſoever they ſay to ye, that obſerve ye, & do ye; but do not*

(t) *Matth.* 23. 1. 2. 3.

not ſquare your actions *according to their works; for they ſay, & do not.* And indeed our Natural Reaſon is enough to teach us the Equity of this Truth. For, when once a Judge is appointed by the Law, although a private perſon at the Bar may juſtly hope himſelf to the better man of the two; yet, if he ſhould therefore offer to juſtle him off the Bench, & diſown the Authority of his Comiſſion, ſuch an inſolence would never be endur'd in any Form of Government.

II. *He* (*u*) *that hears you*, ſays *Chriſt* to his Diſciples, *hears me: and he that deſpiſes you, deſpiſes me.* This Text ſhews plainly that (*w*) *God who ſpoke, in time paſt, to the Fathers*

(u) *Luk.* 10. 16. (w) *Heb.* 1. 1.

Fathers by the Prophets, and *in these last days spoke unto us by his Son*, now still continues speaking to us by our Confessors, who though they (x) *are not sufficient of themselves*, yet *God has made* them *able Ministers of the New Testament*; (y) *and has committed to* them *the word of Reconciliation*, So that we ought to look upon them as *Ambassadors for Christ*, *as if God* himself *did exhort* us *by* them. If we had been present at the Transfiguration of our Saviour, & had heard that (z) *voice which came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son, Hear him:* What a mighty influence would it have had upon our Minds & Hearts? And ought not we as much to reverence

(x) 2. Cor. 3. 5. 6. (y) 2. Cor. 5. 9. 20. (z) Luk. 9. 35.

verence the voice of *Chriſt*, as if we heard a voice from *Heaven?* When our Saviour tells us, *He that hears* my Miniſters, *hears me*; although our fears may raiſe a miſt, & quite ſurround us with a cloud, yet ſtill theſe words of his are like a *Voice out of the cloud*, and a Voice as eaſy to be underſtood, as if he had ſaid, *Thoſe are my beloved Miniſters, Hear them.*

I ſhall onely take notice of one particular circumſtance, which I hope will help to make ſome people ſenſible of the importance of this Text. I mean thoſe who are ſo ſtrangely terrified with thinking, that their Confeſſions never are exact, that they never love God above all things, that they never do ſufficient pennance for their

their Sins, that they are not in the State of Grace, and that they are not in the number of God's Elect. If they are so terribly afraid of being (a) *like Sheep* which are *going astray*; if they are sincerely desirous *to return unto the Shepherd of their Souls*; Let them harken seriously to the voice of (b) *that great Shepherd of the Sheep* who says, (c) *I am the good Pastor.* (d) *My Sheep*, says he, *hear my voice, and they follow me.* We cannot *follow Christ* unless we *hear his voice*: But, if we *hear his voice*, & *follow* it, This is the certain mark, that we are in the number of his Sheep. *My Sheep hear my voice, & they follow me*; (e) *and*

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(a) 1. *Pet.* 2. 25. (b) *Heb.* 13. 20. (c) *Jo.* 10. 14. (d) *ib. v.* 27. (e) *ib. v.* 28. 29.

I give unto them Eternal Life; & they shall not perish for ever; neither shall any one pull them out of my Father's hand. My Father, that which he hath given me, is greater than all: and no one is able to pull them out of my Father's hand. What a comfort is it, to be thus aſſured, that if we *hear his voice*, and *follow* it, he will not fail to *give* us *Eternal* Life! What a joy, to think that we *ſhall never perish*! And how does it tranſport & ravish us, when we conſider that although the World, the Flesh, & all the Devils in Hell conſpire againſt us, yet our *Father in Heaven is greater than all*; &, if we *hear the voice* of his *Son*, *No one* will ever be *able to pull us out of our Father's hand?* What would we give, what would we

we do, what would we ſuffer, to be ſure that we are in the happy number of thoſe who *hear the voice* of *Chriſt*! Remember therefore, and conſider what he ſays; *If you hear* his Miniſters, *you hear* him; and if you *deſpiſe* them, you *deſpiſe* him.

III. *When* our Saviour *aſcended* (*f*) *he gave Paſtors and Teachers*, not onely *for the work of the Miniſtry*, and *for the edifying the body Chriſt*, but alſo *that we henceforth be no more children, toſs'd to & fro, & carried about with every wind of doctrine.* And certainly, unleſs they were appointed by *Chriſt* to be our Guides & Judges, tis very hard to underſtand, how they ſhould hinder us from being *toſs'd to & fro, &*

(*f*) *Epheſ.* 4. 8, 11, 12, 14.

& carried about with what *wind of doctrine* we pleaſe. But the thing which here is moſt remarkable, is this: Before he *went* (*g*) *his way to him that ſent* him, He ſaid, *I tell you the truth, It is expedient for you that I go away.* Which words being extended to the generality of the Faithfull, to whom the *Comforter* was *ſent* as well as to the Diſciples, 'tis hard to forbear the ſtarting of a very material queſtion: How? Is it *expedient for us* to exchange an *infallible* Guide, for a company of Confeſſors, who are every one of them *fallible*? Yes. It certainly is ſo. For, 1. Our Submiſſion is *equally ſecure*, and that's as good: 2. Our Obedience is *more humble*, and that's a great deal better.

If

(*g*) *Jo.* 16. 5, 7.

If you ask me, By what Authority we can be *ſo ſecure* under the direction of a fallible Guide? Pray, is not *his* Authority ſufficient who will, one day, *come to judge the quick & the dead*? Can you imagine, he is ſo unjuſt, as to condemn us for ſubmitting humbly & ſincerely to *his* own *Authority*? And, if he cannot poſſibly condemn us for it, are we not *ſecure*? Tis he himſelf (who knows a great deal better than we do, how fallible they are) 'tis He, I ſay, who has appointed them to be our Judges; and therefore 'tis by his appointment, that in doubtfull matters we ſubmit our judgment to them. Hear what he ſays himſelf: (*b*) *As my Father hath ſent me even ſo I ſend* them. *Whoſe ſoever*

(b) *Jo.* 20. 21, 23.

ver they Sins they *remit*, *they are remitted unto them*; *and whoſe ſoever ſins* they *retain*, *they are retained.*

I ſhall add no gloſs to this Text. The *Church of God* is the beſt interpreter of his *Word.* She is (*i*) *the pillar & the ground of Truth.* If we believe our *Creed*; if we believe the *Holy Catholick Church*; If we believe the ſolemn declaration of a *General Council* approved & univerſally receiv'd; There is nothing more certain than that our *Confeſſors* are by *Chriſt* appointed *Judges* to diſcern & to determine all matters belonging to Confeſſion. The words of the Council of *Trent* are theſe. (*k*) *Our Lord* JESUS CHRIST

(i) 1. *Tim.* 3. 15. (k) Dominus noſter Jeſus Chriſtus, à terris aſcenſurus ad cœlos, Sacerdotes ſui ipſius Vicarios

CHRIST before he ascended from Earth to Heaven, left Priests his Vicegerents, as Presidents & Judges, to whom all mortall Sins are to be declared, that they may accordingly pronounce Sentence. So plain it is, that our Ghostly Fathers have their *Commission* from *God*, & *Patent* from his *Church*, to be our *Judges* in matters of *Conscience*; and consequently to *pronounce* a final *Sentence* upon all our *doubtfull cases.*

reliquit, tanquam præsides & judices, ad quos omnia mortalia crimina deferantur; quo, pro potestate Clavium remissionis aut retentionis peccatorum, sententiam pronuncient, *Sess.* 14. cap. 5.

CHAP.

CHAP. XII.

Maxims of S. Bernard, *concerning Blind Obedience.*

I Have now done with *Scripture*: and, to give an account of the *Fathers*, I have made choice of *S. Bernard*, whom I look upon as the laſt Father of the Church, & the beſt able to expreſs the ſentiments of all the reſt who went before him. His eminent Learning & Vertue were the Oracle as well as Miracle of the twelfth Age. His Doctrine & Example were the greaſt Inſtruction & the Admiration of all: when in the darkneſs & the coldneſs of thoſe times, which were the winter-ſeaſon of Devotion, he unexpectedly appeard, like *fire* ex-

preſſely *ſent* from Heaven to enlighten & enflame the minds & hearts of ignorant & tepid Chriſtians.

He has written a whole book particularly upon this ſubject: and, the whole care of his life being chiefly employ'd in cultivating & improving the *Vertue* of *Blind Obedience*, we may very well allow him to have rightly underſtood it. He diſcourſes, for the moſt part, concerning the blind obedience which is due to a *Prelate* or *Superior*, addreſſing himſelf particularly to *Religious* perſons, who by vow are bound to obſerve it. But nevertheleſs the Submiſſion, which is due from all Penitents to their Confeſſors, is a Caſe exactly parallel to it, & is directly comprehended under the general no-

tion

tion of it. And beſides, 'tis obvious to every body's common ſenſe, that thoſe practiſes which are univerſally reputed vertuous in a Cloiſter, can never be juſtly cenſur'd as unlawfull in the World: but whatſoever the Religious *muſt* do, the Seculars *may* lawfully do it, if they pleaſe.

MAX. I.

We ought to look upon our Confeſſor as a Vicegerent of God, without conſidering his faults.

WHether (l) *it be God, or Man his Vicegerent, who impoſes an obligation upon us,*

(l) Sive Deus, ſive homo Vicarius Dei, mandatum quodcunque tradiderit; pari profecto obſequendum eſt curâ, pari reverentiâ deferendum. *S. Bern.* lib. de præcept. & diſpen. cap. 9.

us, we are to obey with the ſame care, and ſubmit with the ſame reſpect. (m) *What matter is it, whether God impart his will & pleaſure to us, by himſelf, or by the Miniſtry of Men, or Angels? Whatſoever it is that Man preſcribes, as Vicegerent of God, unleſs*

(m) Quid enim intereſt, utrum per ſe an per ſuos miniſtros, ſive homines ſive Angelos, hominibus innoteſcat ſuum placitum Deus? Quamobrem quicquid vice Dei præcipit homo, quod non ſit *certum* diſplicere Deo; haud ſecus omnino accipiendum quam ſi præcipiat Deus. Præſertim cum teneas de Scripturis, quia Labia Sacerdotis cuſtodiunt ſcientiam, & legem de ore ejus requirunt; quia Angelus Domini exercituum eſt. Requirunt, dixerim, Legem; non quam ratio manifeſta probaverit, ſed quod ita latere aut obſcurum eſſe cognoſcitur, ut in *dubium* venire poſſit, utrumne Deus ſic an aliter fortè velit, ſi non de labiis cuſtodientibus ſcientiam, & ex ore Angeli Domini exercituum *certum* reddatur. *ibid.*

leſs it be CERTAINLY *diſpleaſing to him, we ought to accept it in the ſame manner, as if God himſelf had ordain'd it. Eſpecially ſince we read in Scripture, that the lips of the Prieſt keep knowledge, & they require the Law at his mouth, becauſe he is the Angel of the Lord of Hoſts. They ſeek the Law,* ſays he, *not in things which our Reaſon proves* MANIFESTLY *to us, but in matters which are ſo hidden & obſcure, that we might poſſibly* DOUBT, *whether God would have it ſo, or not; unleſs it were* MADE CERTAIN, *by thoſe lips which are the Keepers of Knowledge, & by the mouth of the Angel of the Lord of Hoſts.* Can any man ſpeak more plainly than *S. Bernard* does, upon this occaſion?

And now, perhaps, ſome body may be apt to ſay; If I had but ſuch a man as *S. Bernard*, for my Confeſſor, I could rely upon his word as confidently as if God himſelf had ſaid it: but when I conſider the weakneſs & the indiſcretion of my Ghoſtly Father, I dare not venture to truſt him.

To this Objection a learned Divine returns this Anſwer, that Penitents do not rely upon their Confeſſor (n) *becauſe he is* LEAR-

(n) Dicet fortaſſe quiſpiam, ſi talis mihi eſſet Prælatus, qualis erat *S. Bernardus*, facilè acquieſcerem: nunc verò dum Superioris mei parvam ſapientiam aſpicio, non audeo ei acquieſcere. R. Inferiores non obediunt Prælato, quia ſit *doctus*, quia *prudens*, quia *Sanctus*, ſed quia vicem Dei gerit, hoc ipſo quo eſt legitimus ſuperior *Sylvius*. in 1. 2. q. 19. a. 5. d. 12. c. 8.

LEARNED, PRUDENT, or VERTUOUS, but barely becauſe he ſupplies the place of God, who has appointed him to be their Judge in all doubtfull matters relating to Confeſſion. But ſince you own ſo frankly, that if you had *S. Bernard* for your Confeſſor, you could eaſily rely upon him: Hear what *S. Bernard* ſays himſelf. (o) *Be not affrighted at the unskilfulneſs of his Teaching, or the indiſcretion of his Authority; but remember that there is no power but of God; and that they who reſiſt Authority, reſiſt the ordinance of God.*

Tis true, This Maxim of

(o) Non te moveat Magiſter imperitus, indiſcreta poteſtas; ſed memento quia non eſt poteſtas niſi à Deo, & qui reſiſtit poteſtati, reſiſtit Dei ordinationi. *S. Bern.* Serm. 41. de diverſis.

S. Bernard allows of one exception from the general rule, which is, that when we are *absolutely certain* of our Confessor's being mistaken, we may lawfully refuse to submit to him. (p) *In these things*, says he, *we neither expect any body's Teaching, nor mind any body's Forbidding.* But here it is that all Timorous Consciences must have a great care, of not *being mistaken* themselves, when they think their Confessor *is so.* The *Exception* is very true, but they must be carefull not to destroy the *Rule* with it. They are apt to fear on the wrong side; and Fear is a strange Passion, which commonly misrepresents what-

(p) De hujusmodi nec præceptor expectandus, nec prohibitor auscultandus est. *S. Bern.* lib. de præcep. & dispen. cap. 9.

whatever comes in its way. They look at every thing with a pair of ſpectacles made of falſe glaſſes, the one magnifying the Sin, the other multiplying the circumſtances, & both conſpiring to deceive them. In this condition they conſult their Confeſſor, and tell him a terrible Story, which, by their good will, they would never make an end of. Their Confeſſor, who is generally well acquainted with theſe humours, & ſoon ſees what they would be at, begins to cut them short: And 'tis no wonder he does ſo, becauſe he ſees things plainly, with his own natural eyes, & will not be prevail'd upon to uſe their ſpectacles, becauſe he knows what glaſs they are made of. Now, this offends them ſtrangely; and

without any more adoe, they think they have all the reaſon in the world to conclude, He's *certainly* miſtaken. He allows them, may be, onely half a quarter to examine; and they are *certain* that three or four hours are too little, for the purpoſe. They are *certain* they ought to confeſs ſome things, which he forbids them to ſpeak of. They are *certain* they are obliged in Conſcience, to make a general Confeſſion; although he tells them, they need it no more than they do the head-ake.

Poor Creatures! In theſe perplexities they *mean* very well; but they *do* very ill. For, even in things which ſeem evident to them, they ought to beware of being miſtaken, & of making things matter of Con-

Conſcience which are far from being ſo. They ought to beware the ſetting up of a falſe God to themſelves, & ſacrificing all the Duties of Obedience to an Idol of their own invention. Their pretended Conſcience is neither better nor truer for the heat & zeal with which they maintain it. Even Heathens themſelves are oftentimes more zealous than Chriſtians: And (the Devil helping his ſervants) it is commonly obſerved, that men are fiercer in the wrong than in the right. Who would ſet up a fallible Guide againſt an infallible one? This Conſcience of theirs is fallible, not onely *in it ſelf*, but alſo *to them*; becauſe when, by their fault, it is erroneous, is does not excuſe them. But their Confeſſor

is always infallible *to them*, although he never is ſo *in himſelf*; becauſe it is infallibly true, that they are always excuſed, when in any doubt they humbly & ſincerely follow his advice.

When nothing elſe will do, They chiefly inſiſt upon this; that they are very *certain* their Confeſſor does not rightly underſtand them, becauſe they are ſure that, if he did, he would certainly be of their opinion. But ſurely ſuch a pleaſant argument as this, is little better than that of Poet *Bayes*. *When I have a mind*, ſays he, *to know whether a man be a man of parts, or not; What do me I, but give him one of my Plays to read? He reads it. If he likes it; Well. If not; I know what to think of him.*

Much

Much at this rate, theſe people go to their Confeſſor, with one of their huge & mighty Scruples. He hears it. If he approves their opinion; All's well. If not; They know for *certain* he muſt needs be grievouſſly miſtaken.

Tis very hard, you'l ſay, *for people to think otherwiſe: Eſpecially when they can* almoſt *ſwear, they are in the right.*

The prouder they are, the harder it is: but if they were ſufficiently humble, it would be a very eaſy matter. Eſpecially, when they cannot quite *ſwear*. For if their heart goes *pit a pat* with fear of being perjur'd, when they think of laying hand upon the Book & making a ſolemn Oath; Then they may very well aſſure them-

themſelves, that there is ſtill ſome little doubt lies lurking in their Minds, and that therefore they may boldly reckon it amongſt the doubtfull caſes, in which their Confeſſor has full Commiſſion to direct them.

S. Tereſa was certainly ſo fully perſwaded of her Viſions being true & real, that she could *almoſt* have ſworn, they were ſo: And yet she would not therefore venture to diſobey her Confeſſor. Hear how *F. Craſſet* deſcribes her behaviour in this caſe. (q) *JESUS appear'd to* S. Tereſa *two ſeveral ways; in his own perſon, & in the perſon of her Confeſſor. Jeſus himſelf teaches her infallible truths: Her Confeſſor, who repreſents him, tells her,*

(q) *Conſid. ſur les Epiſtes. Octob. 15.*

her, they are ſo many lies. What ſhall Tereſa *do? Whom ſhall ſhe believe? She never deliberates upon the matter: She chuſes rather to obey* Jeſus *in the perſon of her Confeſſor, than in his own perſon. I may be miſtaken,* ſays she, *in believing theſe Viſions; but I ſhall never be miſtaken in obeying my Directour. I am not abſolutely certain that it is the Son of God who appears to me; but I am certain that it is he who ſpeaks to me by my Superiours. If they tell me otherwiſe than he does, I'l believe them ſooner than him, becauſe he commands me ſo to do.*

MAX.

MAX. II.

We ought to look upon him as our Judge, without examining his reaſons.

THIS (r) *a Sign of an imperfect Heart, and of a very weak Will, to demurr upon every thing that is enjoin'd; to exact a reaſon for every thing; to think ill of every precept which we*

(r) Imperfecti cordis eſt, & infirmæ prorſus voluntatis, hærere ad ſingula quæ injunguntur; exigere de quibuſque rationem; & malè ſuſpicari de omni præcepto cujus cauſa latuerit; nec unquam libenter obedire, niſi cum audire contigerit quod fortè libuerit, aut quod non aliter licere ſeu expedire monſtraverit vel aperta ratio, vel indubitata authoritas. . Non planè hæc eſt illa quæ ex Regulâ traditur, *Obedientia ſine mora.* S. Bern. lib. de præcep. & diſpen. c. 10.

we do not know the cauſe of; and never to obey willingly, unleſs we hear what pleaſes us, or unleſs the neceſſity or convenience of it, be proved by manifeſt reaſon or by ſome unqueſtionable Authority. This is far from the Obedience which the Rule requires: OBEDIENCE WITHOUT DELAY. (s) *We ought to be Submiſſive & Obedient, without aſking any queſtion for Conſcience ſake.* These words of *S. Bernard* are too plain to need any Comment, and therefore I ſhall onely endeavour to ſhew the evils which infallibly attend thoſe people, who will never ſubmit to their Confeſſor in any par-

(s) Subditi & obedientes eſſe debemus ad nutum Præpoſitorum, nihil interrogantes propter conſcientiam. *S. Bern.* Serm. 41. de diverſis.

particular difficulty, unleſs he firſt give a ſatisfactory reaſon for it, and convince them by meer dint of argument.

1. To avoid the fear of an imaginary Sin on the one ſide, they put themſelves evidently into a real danger of Sinning on the other.

2. They affront *Chriſt* himſelf, by rebelling againſt his Government.

3. They willfully oppoſe the kind deſigns of God's great Mercy to them, in allowing them a Guide.

I. To avoid an imaginary Sin, they put themſelves evidently in a real danger of Sinning. *My Confeſſor*, you'l ſay, *is fallible: How dare I rely upon him?* Pray, are not you fallible too? How dare you rely upon your ſelf? If he miſtake,

take, 'tis his fault: but if you miſtake, 'tis yours. If you depend upon him without examining his reaſons, the danger is onely his; But if you are inquiſitive & will depend upon your ſelf, you bring the danger to your own door; and, if there be any miſtake, you are juſtly accountable for it. You may e'en thank your ſelf; You ſought for danger, & you found it; You *loved* it, & who can help your *perishing* in it?

But am not I to take care, that my Confeſſor be not miſtaken?

Are not you aſhamed to ask ſuch a queſtion? *God* and his *Church* have *both* appointed him to be *your Guide*: And muſt you therefore take upon you to be *his*?

But whilſt my Confeſſor directs

rects me, it were to be wisht that some body would direct him.

That's God's *care*. He himself *takes* that upon him, & excuses you from troubling your head about it. If you cannot help suspecting that your Confessor is a bad man, and that therefore God will not direct him: You may make amends for it, by *taking* what *care* you can, to be as good, as you should be, your self: And then (if you humbly desire it, & heartily pray for it) God will be sure to direct him for *your* sake, although he would not do so much for *his*. *B. Sales* advises you (*t*) *to pray to God with very great instance*, and afterwards (*u*) *not to regard him simply as a man, nor to trust in him, nor in his human prudence, but in the Providence*

(*t*) *Introd.* p. 1. ch. 4. n. 3. (u) *ibid.* n. 4.

vidence of Almighty God, who will undoubtedly favour your endeavours, and ſpeak to you by the interpoſition of this man; putting into his mind, & into his mouth, thoſe things which ſhall be moſt expedient for your ſpiritual advancement. In ſhort, there is nothing more certain, than that God will either *direct* him or *excuſe* you. Be it which way it will, your Soul can never be in danger, upon this account. For, as long as you *cannot ſwear*, your Confeſſor is miſtaken; ſo long you *may* lawfully *ſwear*, you are Secure. *S. Bernard* propoſes the ſame Objection: (*w*) *When matters are*

(w) Sed homines, inquies, facilè falli in Dei voluntate de rebus dubiis percipiendâ, & in præcipiendâ fallere poſſunt. Sed enim, Quid hoc refert tuâ, cui conſcius non es? *S. Bern.* lib. de præcep. & diſpen. c. 9.

are doubtfull, Men may easily deceive themselves in discerning the will of God, & deceive others in prescribing it. To which he roundly answers, *What's that to you, as long as you are not certain of it?*

II. They affront *Christ* himself, by rebelling against his Government. He gives their Confessor a full Commission, to be their *Judge* in all doubtfull cases. They will not acknowledge him, under that character. They'l hearken to him, as to a *Lawyer* at the *Bar*, if he pleases: But, as for the *Bench*, they question very much whether he be either *good* enough, or *wise* enough, to deserve that place, so well as they do. They'l hear his reasons, & consider them: but, when all is done, they are free-born Subjects of the

the Almighty, and are *always* reſolv'd to *judge* for themſelves. *S. Bernard* ſpeaking of this (x) *proud Contempt, & Obſtinate continuance in it*, ſays that *even in little precepts it amounts to more than a little fault, and changes a ſmall tranſgreſſion into a grievous Crime of Rebellion.*

III. They willfully oppoſe the kind deſigns of God's great Mercy to them, in allowing them a Guide. By giving us a Guide, he puts into our hands the beſt means of ſaving our Souls; he ſupplies us with perpetual opportunities of practiſing the beſt of moral vertues, *Humility*

(x) Elatio contemnentis, atque impœnitentis obſtinatio, in minimis quoque mandatis culpam facit non minimam, & convertit in crimen gravis rebellionis culpam ſatis levem ſimplicis tranſgreſſionis. *S. Bern.* ibid. c. 11.

mility & *Obedience*; he leads us into the beſt & readieſt way of following *Jeſus Chriſt* the *Captain of our Salvation*, who *humbled himſelf* & *became obedient*; for which reaſon *God exalted him*, & will exalt us too, provided we follow his example.

Theſe were the vertues He required from our firſt Parents: and to make the practiſe more eaſy, He was pleaſed to be their Guide himſelf. He was every way Infallible: his infinite Wiſdom on the one ſide, & his no leſs infinite Goodneſs on the other, were Vouchers for his Infallibility: And yet their *Pride* and *Diſobedience* found a way to rob them of their Innocence.

To repair this fault of theirs the *Eternal Truth* becomes Incarnate:

carnate, the *Word is made Flesh*, and *dwells amongſt us*: He comes to *enlighten all the World*, and to take care that thoſe, who *follow* him, may never *walk in darkneſs*. And here indeed the terms of our *Obedience* and *Humility* ſeem ſomething harder than before; becauſe we cannot now be ſaved, without ſubmiſſion of our Underſtanding & our Will to *Man* as well as *God*. Tis true; This *Man* is *God*, He is infinitely *Wiſe* & *Good*, He is therefore every way *Infallible*. But all theſe great & glorious advantages are Objects far too bright for our weak eyes, we cannot ſee theſe dazling & amazing truths, but are forced to *believe* without *ſeeing*. Here it is, we *humble* our proud thoughts, & captivate them to

the *obedience* of *Chriſt*: And 'tis the firſt *Croſs* we *take up*, when we begin to *follow* him.

But yet this is not all: Neither is it juſt that this ſhould be enough. If we intend to be *exalted*, we muſt *humble* our ſelves, & be *obedient* one ſtep further. Our Parents would not *ſubmit* to *God* himſelf; and we, who have the ſame blood in our veins, muſt now *ſubmit* not onely to *Man* who is *God*, but to Men who are no more Gods than we are; to *Men* who are as fallible as our ſelves. This is the *Croſs* which we muſt of neceſſity *take up*, if we intend to *follow* him. We muſt be thus far *humble* & *obedient*, if we deſign to be *exalted* with him. To *follow* him, we muſt (y) *hear*

(y) *Jo.* 10. 27.

hear his voice: And, being gone himſelf ſo far before us, What could he contrive better for us, than to leave his Miniſters behind him, and to give us all the encouragement that can be, to rely upon their word; by aſſuring us, that *if we hear* them, *we hear* him? Tis evidently juſt that this ſame proud & ſtubborn Nature of ours, which once aſpired ſo high as to defy *the Higheſt*, ſhould now bow down its head, not onely lower than its Maker, but even lower than the duſt of which he made it. Tis juſt, I ſay, in things indifferent, to reſign our Wills, and in doubtfull matters, to ſubmit our Underſtandings, even to our fallible fellow-creatures who are made of the ſame duſt with us.

Tis hard indeed, at first, for ſo much Pride and Stubbornneſs to yield without ſome little reſiſtance. But however, we are in the hands of a God & a Judge from whom we cannot make our eſcape, and therefore we have reaſon to be glad to kiſs the Rod, although we are not fond of it. Nay, we have reaſon to be fond of it, if we rightly conſider our intereſt. Our Saviour himſelf was pleaſed to tell us, before he *went*, it was *expedient for us* he should *go away*. For although there may be more Difficulty in ſubmitting to his Miniſters, yet the Benefit of it is incomparably greater. The ſelf-denyals of our Underſtanding & our Will are more acceptable to God, when they are offer'd to him in the perſon of a Miniſter

who

who repreſents him. They are more humble, & therefore more acceptable. And here I know not which to admire moſt; the Equity of his Juſtice, in making this the puniſhment of our Sin; or the Kindneſs of his Mercy, in making it the beſt, the eaſieſt, & the moſt effectual means of purchaſing our Everlaſting Happineſs. Our *Croſs* indeed, is heavier; but the Reward is greater. The occaſions of *taking it up*, are more frequent; but they onely ſerve to multiply the glories of our *Crown*, when we ſhall, one day, be *exalted* for it.

This is *One* kind deſign, which God has laid in order to our future Happineſs: And *this* we willfully oppoſe as often as we refuſe to ſubmit, without a particular & a convincing

reaſon for it. There is certainly no *Humility* in never ſubmitting, but when our natural Reaſon is convinc'd; nor is there any *Obedience* in never complying, but when we naturally have a mind to it. The very worſt of Atheiſts & Libertins are every jot as *humble* and *obedient* as this: They never make any difficulty, of *Believing* what they *ſee*, or *Doing* what they *pleaſe*.

A *Second* deſign of the Divine Providence in allowing us a Guide, is to make us truly Happy, not onely *hereafter*, but even *here*. Now this is a double Kindneſs, & the greateſt that can be imagin'd; that God is not contented to crown our Happineſs at our journey's end, but deſires to give us a taſt of it before hand, and of-

fers

fers us as much of it as we are able to carry with us thither. By leading us into the way of *Blind Obedience*, He removes the cauſes of our inward trouble and diſquiet, & lays a ſure foundation of interiour comfort & tranquillity of mind. And this I ſhall endeavour to give a particular account of, out of pity & compaſſion to thoſe Timorous Conſciences, who make it their great deſign to pleaſe themſelves, but know not how to go about it.

One would admire to ſee the ſtrange perverſeneſs and frowardneſs of people, when they are poſſeſs'd with panick fear. Every thing lies croſs in their way. The very ſhadow of an obligation is enough to put them in a fright: What ever it is, they think it morally impoſſible to

be comply'd with; and therefore hate the very thought of it. God gives them a *Guide*: and becauſe this looks as if they were obliged in Conſcience to follow his direction, therefore they ſtart back, & cry, *What is our Reaſon good for, if in doubts we muſt ſubmit it to our Guide?* And yet, if God had bid them rely entirely upon their *Reaſon*, they would perhaps have thought it the harder meaſure of the two, and would have argued the contrary way, *What is our Guide good for, if we may not ſafely relie upon him?* They would fain be doing their duty; and for fear of doing it the wrong way, they never do it right. They are too wiſe to truſt their Confeſſor; and yet they are not wiſe enough to truſt themſelves. They are deſ-

perately

perately fond of *ſpeculative certainty*: but the miſchief is, it is not to be found. *Probability* ſometimes flatters them with hopes of *abſolute certainty*; but always deceives them, & puts them off with doubtfull *if's* & *and's*, which are never able to give them any ſatisfaction. This is the reaſon why they are always fearfull, & always inquiſitive to find out reaſons to appeaſe their fears. But after all their vain endeavours to confirm & ſettle their opinion, they can never attain to a ſteddy & unshaken perſwaſion of it. Their Conſcience ever & anon recoyls upon them; and all their plauſible reaſoning is ſtill born down & confuted by a ſtrong ſuſpicion which they can never get out of their minds, that perhaps they are ſtill miſtaken.

But that which I moſt admire, is the ſtrange obſtinacy of their humour, who after long experience having felt the ſmart of their miſerable condition, are ſtill reſolved to continue in it. They dayly find themſelves at a loſs: They have all the reaſon in the world to conclude they are in the wrong way: And yet they ſtill go on. A Traveller is wiſer than ſo. As ſoon as he finds himſelf out of the way, he preſently ſtops his courſe, he turns towards the right way with all the ſpeed he can, and has not the leaſt inclination to go wrong any further. But the minds of theſe people are ſo hurried away, by their unreaſonable prejudices, that though they find themſelves in the wrong, they cannot endure to

return

return to the right. They expect to ſee an end of all their fears, & then they intend to be as obedient as you pleaſe. Mean time, they beg pardon, if they defer their Obedience till the practiſe of it be a little more eaſy to them. Now this is a fancy which is every jot as extravagant as that of the *Ideot*, who being come to the river ſide, & being obliged to paſs over, durſt not venture in a boat, but reſolv'd to expect till the water was all gone, & left the channel dry. He obſerv'd the ſwiftneſs of the ſtream, and fancied it would ſoon run quite away, & leave him a free & eaſie paſſage. But the river runs, & ſtill runs on, and though he ſhould expect a thouſand years, 'twould never leave off running. And

ſo 'tis in our preſent caſe. Their doubts & jealouſies, their reaſonings & diſputings, will ſtill run on, & never have an end. Tis impoſſible they ſhould ever have any tolerable enjoyment of themſelves, or ever be able to ſhake off theſe tormenting fears, but by ſubmitting to the *eaſy yoke* of *Jeſus Chriſt*, & by ſecuring themſelves under his protection, whom hitherto they have affronted, by deſpiſing of his Miniſters. Nothing but *Blind Obedience* can free them from all this miſery, by removing the cauſes of their inward trouble & diſquiet, & by laying a ſure foundation of interiour comfort & tranquillity of mind.

The principal cauſe of their inward trouble, is this. They rely entirely upon their own judg-

judgment: and therefore have juſt reaſon to conclude, that they are unavoidably accountable for every miſtake they commit. And this is abundantly enough to make them always jealous, that, for ought they know, God's Juſtice may be making towards them, and his Anger levell'd againſt them. But this cauſe ceaſes immediately, as ſoon as they entertain the principles of *Blind Obedience*: Becauſe 'tis evident, when God has given them a Confeſſor to direct them, it cannot be his will & pleaſure that this Guide ſhould be directed & guided by them. Tis true; He may be miſtaken: But let him look to that. Tis none of their buſineſs to examine him: On the contrary 'tis commendable in them to

ſubmit

ſubmit (z) *without asking any queſtion for Conſcience ſake.* And therefore, although his miſtakes may perhaps be fatal to himſelf, tis as clear as the Meridian Sun, that they can never be fatal to them, nor can they ever be accountable for any thing which he adviſes.

Another more ſecret cauſe of their inward diſquiet, is well expreſs'd by S. *Auſtin*, who ſays, *Thou haſt made us, O Lord, for thy ſelf; & our hearts are alwa[illegible] reſtleſs, till we reſt in Thee.* All creatures are uneaſy when they are out of their natural Element. Nothing is at reſt, but whilſt it is in that ſtate which Nature intended for it. Obedience is the natural ſtate of the Soul: it was made to obey its Maker: and

(z) *S. Bernard. ſup.*

and the conſtant practice of this Vertue, is the condition to which God deſign'd it. He gave us our Reaſon; not to make us Rebels, but to make us reaſonable Subjects: and therefore all our acts of Submiſſion to the Authority of his Government, are rational & ſuitable to the firſt inſtitution of our Nature. Our Reaſon is a Ray of the Divinity; it imprints the image of our Maker on our Souls; and writes the fundamental laws of our Submiſſion, in ſo plain a character, that though our Paſſions now and then obſcure it, yet they never can efface it. As long as (a) *our Souls are ſubject to the higher powers ordain'd by God*; (b) *obeying*

(a) *Rom.* 13. 1. (b) *Hebr.* 13. 17.

obeying them that rule over us, & ſubmitting our ſelves to thoſe who *watch for our Souls*; ſo long our Souls are in their natural temper, and are in very good health, becauſe they are in that State in which they ought to be, according to the primitive intention of their Being. But when we *reſiſt the power* of Authority; when we (*c*) *reſiſt the ordinance of God*; when we revolt againſt the Government of *Jeſus-Chriſt*, by deſpiſing the Commiſſion he has given to our Confeſſor, and by refuſing in doubtfull caſes to acknowledge the ſufficiency and ſafety of his Direction; then it is that we act contrary to the inward light of our minds, our Conſcience checks us, and makes us uneaſy.

(*c*) *Rom.* 13. 2.

eaſy. And how can we hope to be at eaſe, as long as we have poyſon within us, which puts us in a ſickly & diſeaſed condition? Our Pride and Willfullneſs put all our ſpirits in a continual fermentation. Our minds can never be ſerene, as long as they are clouded with the fumes of our diſtemper. All the common arts of diverſion will never avail us: we may change our place, our poſture, our phyſick, & our Phyſician too; but we ſhall ſtill be reſtleſs, till the cauſe be removed, which creates our diſturbance. (*d*) *There is no peace, ſays my God, to the wicked.* But, as in our body we find an unexpreſſible eaſe & pleaſure, when it is in perfect ſtate of health; So when Obedience corrects

(*d*) *Iſai.* 57. 21.

corrects the proud and willfull humours of our Soul, restores the even temper of our Mind, & smooths the way before us; Then it is that All is easy to us. We easily *know* what we are bid to do: And, being humble, we as easily *do* it.

The Obedience, which I speak of, not onely removes the causes of our inward trouble & disquiet; but lays a sure foundation of interiour comfort & tranquillity of mind, by affording us the best *Security*, that we can wish for, during Life; and the greatest *Joy*, that we can think of, at the hour of Death. What greater *Security* can our hearts desire, than to be under the protection of God himself, the *Shepherd of our Souls*, who knows a great deal better, than

than we do, what is good for us, and will not ſuffer us to *go aſtray*, becauſe he loves us better than we love our ſelves? He was our Enemy before; whilſt we rebell'd againſt his Government: But, by deteſting our paſt pride & folly, & ſubmitting to his Miniſters, he now becomes our Friend. All Friendship is comfortable: but this is the beſt of Friendships, and therefore is the greateſt & divineſt comfort. Tis a great ſatisfaction, to feel that we our ſelves love God: and a double ſatisfaction, to hope that He himſelf loves us. Then it is, that we may ſay to our Soul, as *David* did, (e) *Return unto thy reſt, O my Soul*; (f) *My God is my Light, & my Salvation; Whom ſhall I fear? My God*

(e) *Pſal.* 114. 7. (f) *Pſal.* 26. 1.

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(e) *Pſal.* 114. 7. (f) *Pſal.* 26. 1.

God is the Protector of my Life; of whom shall I be afraid?

As 'tis our beſt *Security*; during life; ſo 'tis our greateſt *Joy* at the approach of Death, and yields moſt comfort then when we ſtand moſt in need of it. Tis a terrible thing to a departing Soul, when it looks back upon a proud & willfull courſe of life, which inſtead of being ſpent in the ſervice of God, has been perpetually employ'd in idle reaſoning & diſputing, *how* to ſerve him, *when* to ſerve him, & *whether* to ſerve him *or no.* What can ſuch people plead in their behalf? Tis certainly no good excuſe, to ſay, *Lord, we have always been rebellious againſt thy Government; but the reaſon was, becauſe we were afraid to rely upon it; and indeed, we durſt*

not take thy word for it , becauſe we thought it fitter for us, in all our doubts, to govern our ſelves according to our own fancy. Tis true, we have ſeldome, or never, done our Duty; but we hope thou wilt pleaſe to pardon our willfull omiſſions of it , becauſe we were always ſo mighty buſy in thinking & conſidering of it, that we could never find time to do it. Here it is, their guilty Conſcience lies in wait to accuſe them , & never is more fierce than in the day of adverſity. When Eternity , that terrifying object , at the hour of death, preſents it ſelf before their thoughts ; when they feel themſelves beginning to ſink into the regions of darkneſs; when they are ready to die at the amazing apprehenſion of their final Sentence;

How

How will the Guilt of all their Diſobedience then ſtare them in the face! With what regret & terrour will they then behold it, in its own true ſhape! What tumults and convulſions will it raiſe within their breaſts, when they obſerve a long black train of proud & willfull practices, which very well deſerve to be attended with a longer & a blacker train of everlaſting miſeries!

But it is not ſo with thoſe who have in time repented of of their folly, and have proved ſincerely *humble* & *obedient*. In their greateſt temptations, all is calm & ſerene within, when there is nothing but darkneſs & clouds about them. All their their acts of Submiſſion are ſo many ſeeds of peace & comfort ſown in their Conſciences, which

which never fail to ſpring up, & flouriſh moſt, when the day of diſtreſs approaches. When the pangs of Death are ready to lay hold of them, and they are juſt going to ſtep into the other world, What a ſeaſonable refreshment is it to their thoughts, too look back upon an *humble* & *obedient* courſe of life? Then it is that the pleaſure of it over-flows their minds, the joys of Heaven begin to ſpring up in their hearts, & are a true & ſolid comfort which will ſtick cloſe to them & ſtand faithfully by them in the day of Trial, when they have moſt need of it. O what a Joy it is, to conſider that their greateſt *Friend*, who has been heretofore the *Shepherd of their Souls*, is now the *Judge* of their Actions! to reflect that their *Humility*

mility in *hearing* his *Voice*, & their *Obedience* in *following* it, are the certain marks by which he *knows* the happy number of *his Sheep*! and to remember that he will not fail to *ſet them on his right hand*, when He *comes in glory* to pronounce the Sentence of their Everlaſting Happineſs! To *hear his Voice* was once the *Security* of their life: And to *hear* the *ſame*, is now the *Joy* of their death. *My Sheep*, ſays he, *hear my Voice, & they follow me: and I give unto them Eternal Life: and they ſhall not perish for ever. Come ye Bleſſed of my Father*; Come & *inherit the Kingdom, which was prepared for you, from the foundation of the World.* Amen.

FINIS.